

**The common wine cult of Christ and the Orphic Dionysos: the wine and vegetation saviour deity Dionysos as model for the dying and rising Christ.**

MA Thesis, Master's Programme in Culture and Ideas, History of Religion, Department of Culture and Oriental Languages, Autumn 2010, by Maritha Elin Gebhardt.

**Synopsis:**

In 2005 the Hebrew University Excavation Project unearthed a small incense burner from the fourth century C.E. in the Jewish capital of the Galilee, Sepphoris, depicting a crucified figure, Bacchic satyrs and maenads, and the Christian representation of the sacrifice of Isaac in symbolic form as a ram caught in the thicket of a bush. Five years later the book *Orphism and Christianity in Late Antiquity*, by Herrero de Jáuregui, refers to two large funerary cloths, one depicts a Dionysiac scene similar to the murals from the Villa dei Misteri and the other one show scenes from the life of Jesus and Mary, both found in the same tomb in Egypt. Both of these depictions testify to the continued syncretism of the Orphic and the Christian symbols and that people in the Hellenistic era found the figure of Christ similar to the Bacchic Orpheus.

In my thesis I claim that the dying and rising saviour deity of Dionysos is the forerunner to the dying and rising saviour deity of Christ. I claim that I will prove this by showing that the cult of Christ is a wine cult. The epiphany of Jesus was as a human guest at a party, turning water into wine at the wedding-feast at Cana in *John 2:1-11*, likewise the epiphany of the wine-god Dionysos is in a similar scene as the Cana-miracle, where he turns water into wine (Achilleus Tatius' *De Leucippes et Clitophontis amoribus* 2.2:1-2.3:1). The wine is present and tied to Christianity in all its religious aspects. Wine was a strong symbol of life in the Middle East and had been for more than a thousand years before the birth of Christianity.

After the criticism of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* [1922], historians of religions have hesitated to continue claiming that Jesus was just another dying and rising god of vegetation, mimicking the many gods of vegetation around the Middle East, whose cults offered an eschatological doctrine of hopes for a better afterlife for the initiates. In 2008 Braarvig published his book *Myths, Metaphors and Metaphysics*, where he rekindles the debate where Dionysos is seen as a nature-metaphor, in which we humans reflect our own life when we think and compare our own life with the existence of plants. In the doctrine of Orphism Dionysos was the child of Zeus killed by the titans, slayed and eaten, except for his heart is saved so Zeus can impregnate Semele with the god Dionysos. From the sinful ashes of the titans and the remains of Dionysos, man is created with an inherited sin to atone for in the afterlife, like the original sin of man in Christianity. Orphic Bacchus-cults offered this atonement to free the divine side of man, and was therefore a competitive cult to the Christ cult offering resurrection for the sinful soul.

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## 1. Theme.

*Christianity, a wine cult. Similiar neighbouring wine cults, especially the cult of Dionysos. Corinth and its cults. A phenomenological comparison of Christian and Orphic theology and rituals. Evidence of Dionysiac influence on the Christ cult, and shared Orphic iconography in early Christianity, Graeco-Roman and Jewish religion in the Hellenistic Age.*

### Dionysos as dying and arising wine-god

Professor of religious studies at the University of Oslo, Jens Braarvig writes in his book *Myths, Metaphors and Metaphysics, Orphic Metamorphoses of Dionysus* about Dionysos as a dying and resurrective god, who develops traits of a saviour-deity in Orphism, representing hope for a better fate after death for the devotee; a continued existens for the soul, even a life for the soul after death. At the same time Braarvig treats Dionysos as a nature-metaphor, in which we humans reflect our own life when we think and compare our own growth, life and demise with the existence of plants. The wine-god Dionysos dies with the harvesting and pressing of grapes and is resurrected and given new life when reborn in the wine jars the following spring. In Orphism Dionysos represents one who died to rise again. Braarvig points to different sources and concludes that this Wine-and Saviour god might just as well have influenced Christian theology.

### Presenting my thesis

May we venture even further and claim that the wine-and saviour god Dionysos is the inspiration, if not the origin of Christ as figure of salvation in the afterlife? My claim is that Christianity is a wine cult. The wine is present and tied to Christianity in all its religious aspects. Wine was a strong symbol of life in the Middle East and in all the Mediterranean and had been for more than a thousand years before the birth of Christianity.

Red like blood, wine is the blood of nature, the life force itself. You crush the plant and a liquid as red as blood is spilt, the plant dies but the wine lives on. This metaphor of life was given in libation to the gods and it gave life to the one who drank it.

Jesus continues this when he passes the cup of wine and bids his disciples drink, remembering they are partaking of his blood. «Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.» (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 26:27 King James Version). Indeed the whole body of Christ is a metaphor of wine and life: «Then Jesus said unto them, Verily,

verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.» (*The Gospel of John*, 6:53-56 King James Version).

This identification of Jesus with wine and bread could lead to excesses, where the cult of Christianity was, according to Paul, reduced to a feast of eating and drinking. According to Luther H. Martin Paul rebukes (*I Cor.* 11:17-22) the Corinthian church for misunderstanding the Christian sacramental meal as an occasion for drunken debauchery (Martin 1987:95). The communion signified fellowship, as sharing a meal or a feast of eating and drinking has always symbolized comradeship and togetherness. *The Gospel of John* (2:3 King James Version) tells of another such feast, i.e. the wedding of Cana, where Jesus performs his first miracle. On his mother's invitation, Jesus transforms the water in six waterpots of stone into wine, bidding the servants bring the pots to the governor of the feast.

But Paul also seems to think that wine had other qualities besides that of a symbol of Jesus's blood. In the *first letter to Timothy*, Paul tells his friend to partake of wine for medicinal purposes. «Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities» (*I Tim.* 5:23 King James Version). Wine can restore your health, it brings life and salvation, «the association of wine and blood, with wine being described as the blood of the vine, is ancient and widespread» (Burkert 1985 [1977]: 164). Wine is a symbol of life, as Jesus is a symbol of life, choosing, according to his disciples, wine to symbolize the blood running through his veins.

In the rather ominous *Book of Revelations* (14:18-20), an angel is sent to earth to harvest the grapes, now ripe. Into the press of the wrath of God the fruit of the vine is sent and out pours blood in great amount. Wine is blood and blood ensures life. The wine and blood of Christ is shed to remit sin and to give eternal life to the ones who choose to partake of the holy communion and join the cult.

But this was not the only cult who offered eternal life through the initiate drinking wine, the spilt blood of the god Dionysos. There is strong suspicion that wine played a significant part of the initiation rites in the Orphic cult of Bacchus/Dionysos. «Wine, finally plays its part as well.» (Graf & Johnston 2007:149) Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston goes on to describe rituals depicting the ritual role of wine, but also the eating of bread and sharing a meal to welcome the initiate into the cult. They describe «...the initiation scene on an Attic black-figured pelike (a wine jug) in Naples,

dated to about 500 B.C.E... On the right, two youths with laurel wreaths are sitting next to each other on a couch, facing a table heaped with pieces of meat and with a full bread basket under it; a bearded man with a wine-skin and myrtle twigs in his left hand and a drinking cup in his outstretched right hand addresses the youths...» (Graf & Johnston 2007:149).

«[T]he god was in some sense, at least metaphorically, perceived as the wine itself, and the divinity was perceived as the life in the flourishing and fruitful vegetation. Thus drinking, slaying and eating «the god» must have been experienced as some kind of unification with the divine power of the god, wine being a metaphor for the god, and the god being a metaphor for plant life, and man sharing the same fate as nature, that of dying and, as hoped for by the Orphic devotee, the possibility of resurrecting in some form through *imitatio* of the god.» (Braarvig 2008: 47-48).

Luther H. Martin writes that *The Gospel of John* incorporates the Dionysian wine ritual in the aforementioned wine miracle in Cana, to establish Jesus as a divine epiphany as wine is the epiphany of the god Dionysos. Pausanias writes that in Elis, the priests of Dionysos brought three empty pots into a building, and before the doors were sealed the people witnessed that the pots were empty. When breaking the seals in the morning the citizens find the pots filled with wine. (Pausanias VI, 26,1-2 quoted in Martin 1987:95). The Greek traveller Pausanias wrote his *Description of Greece* in the second century C.E. At the end of the first century C.E., the *Gospel of John* tells of a different divinity bringing forth wine where there were none. Wine plays an important part in the entire *Gospel of John*, bringing the message that only the one who drinks the wine, i.e. the blood of Christ, has life in him. Chapter 15 begins with something that almost looks like a warning against following other cults of wine, making it clear that of all the cults, (i.e. wine) the true wine is Jesus himself: «ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστιν» (Blue Letter Bible, *Gospel of John* 15:1 -(MGNT- Morphological Greek New Testament). In ordinary letters: Ego eimi he ampelos he alethine kai ho pater mou ho georgos estin. Translated directly into English this means: I! (emphasis on I) I am (from the verb: to be, 1.person, singular) the vine(wine) (the) true, and father mine the farmer is.

The King James Bible, translates this with: I am the true vine and my father is the husbandman. (John 15:1: «I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.» Bible.cc/john/15.) But looking at the Greek sentence there is a strong emphasis on **I**, both in the first word and in the following verb, i.e. I am. There is no need to write Ego, I, when writing next: I am, unless there is a strong significance in the I, in contrast to someone else who also presents himself as the vine/wine.

This other cult is the Dionysiac/Orphic cult. The idea of an Orphic god of salvation was not fully formed until the rather late Neoplatonic particular syncretic construction. One way of dealing with my thesis is to limit myself to the writings of the Neoplatonists, especially Olympiodore, with the

support of Proclus and Damascius and debate the discussion between Christian and pagan Neoplatonists, and using Friedmann's identification of Orpheus as the Good Shepherd and Orphic/Dionysiac iconography as a backdrop for this discussion. But I do not want to limit my search to just the Neoplatonists. I want to try and find answers to my initial question: Is there any evidence to support the claim that the Dionysiac, Orphic wine/vegetation saviour divinity is a model for the resurrecting Christ? Or do we find enough evidence to support my thesis that the neighbouring Greco-Roman cults influenced the cult of Christ. I will try to do this by dividing my paper into several interconnected parts of inquiry. I therefore started off by setting myself four tasks.

### **The four initial tasks:**

My initial task would be to show why I claim that Christianity is a wine cult. As I have already demonstrated there is a strong connection, if not emphasis, on wine in the texts above. I wanted to do an extensive search for traces of a wine cult, or aspects of the wine/vegetation motif in early Christianity. When looking at the Christian texts in connection with references to wine, I thought I would also go through the Gnostic Nag Hammadi library, but I soon found the texts of the New Testament giving ample evidence to prove the presence of wine in the cult of Christ.

I posed several questions, asking if the significance of wine was unique to Christianity, or if the wine symbolism in the texts was particularly Christian in its usage? What kind of role did wine play in this Hellenistic society? What was the historical context surrounding this so-called Christian ritual of drinking wine to partake of the divine body itself? Wine is a symbol of life in the Middle East, and we can trace back its significance in human life and ritual more than five thousand years in this region. I wanted therefore to look at the use of wine in Ugaritic religion, but here the sources available to me proved insufficient. I therefore made the search wider, but less detailed.

My second task was, as I have signaled above, to show that wine is indeed an old symbol of rebirth in nature. The perceived regenerative properties of wine is undisputable, as is the fact that there were cults in the area where wine played a significant part. The one cult that bears the strongest similarity to the Christian emphasis on wine is the Dionysian cults. With references to the texts above from the New Testament, among others, I would make a phenomenological comparison of the Christian and the Orphic theology. There has been a strong theological resistance against making this comparison of the wine-divinity Christ and the wine-god Dionysos. In the different books I read on the issue, I met the claim that Dionysos is so different from Christ, representing intoxicated ecstasy, madness, and in some interpretations, the devil himself, hoofs and all. But are

the two divinities so different from each other? There are in fact several similarities between Judao/Christian anthropology and the myth of the original sin and the Orphic anthropology and the Orphic myth of original sin, i.e. the Chthonic and sinful side of man that must be atoned before man can escape the cycle of rebirth and the seven spheres. The sin of man is atoned by Jesus in the Christ cult, the Dionysian Orpheus sets the soul free through initiation into his cult. Jesus was killed and resurrected, Dionysos had a similar fate: slain by the titans and reborn. Orpheus is another human example of a violent death. For more about Orpheus, see below. Already in this introduction have I demonstrated a small connection between the cults.

My third task was to look at the cultural context of the Christian cult and this Orphic cult of Dionysos, and of course the Jewish context from which Christianity evolved. Was Christianity a cult that sprang from Judaism like a Jack in the box, or was it one of many religious alternatives that existed in the Hellenistic period? The Orphic/Bacchic cult of Dionysos was one of the many neighbouring religions, I could therefore not ignore the Demeter/Kore cults which have a strong tie to Bacchus and Orpheus. The Ecclesiastical Father Clementine makes fun of the Bacchic cult, yet demonstrates at the same time that he knew about it. I have therefore looked at the writings of the Church Fathers and the Jewish, Orphic texts, written at the time when Christianity developed from a mystery-cult into a religion in its own right. I asked what Orphism meant for Jewish messianism and mysticism, but found this question to be big for the scope of my thesis.

I decided to also look at common usage of Bacchus/Orpheus in Greek/Roman, Jewish and early Christian iconography. And if so, were there special reasons for this, besides the ordinary cultural and social exchanges that occur between neighbouring people/cultures? An iconographic figure might be used by different religious groups for decoration, because the same decorator has been hired by both groups, but without any other religious significance attached.

I wanted as well to look at the traces of other wine cults, in this shared Hellenistic culture, concentrating on Dionysos/Bacchus in the great Jewish cities of Baalbek and Sepphoris, but here I found the sources available to me to be meagre to form any decisive conclusion. But there is some iconographical finds that has proved interesting for my thesis, I will return to them in the concluding chapter.

Orphism is a mixed religion, many different cultural and cultic influences have made their impact on the shaping of it, Christianity is a mixed religion too, what are the influences that helped shape it? I found that the early churches made up of Gentiles in Greco-Roman cities helped influence the Christ cult they adhered to, even if the literature I read on early Christianity, mostly presented the different fractions of the Christ cult as formed by the Jewish community around Palestine and then



spread by Paul and his fellow travelling apostles. What the influence the different Christ cults outside of Palestine constituted for the development of Christianity was for the most part ignored, directing the focus on the question of influence towards the writing of the church fathers instead, and their fight for a homogeneous movement.

My fourth task would, I believed be look at the geographical context from which the wine cult of Dionysos sprang and Christianity sprang. The region of the Middle East and the Mediterranean was strongly influenced by Hellenic language and culture, yet there was a cultural continuum already present here, where wine-and-vegetation metaphors played a huge part. Dionysos is a product of this old wine district where wine had been a ritual medium for thousands of years. I concentrated this search in a chapter on the **Wine cults around the Mediterranean**, looking at the wine rituals of the old Israelite religion, the funerary feast the Mesopotamians shared with their dead, and the wine libations the Hittites made to their gods. This is not a small region, wine has made its mark here for more than five thousand years, yet the sources seemed hard to come by. Still, the evidence available to me, proved ample to make the presence of wine as a cultural continuum in this region apparent.

The different parts of my paper constitute a chapter on the wine cult of Christ, showing the similarity to the Bacchic cults at the same time. I found the sources on Corinth too extensive and interesting to avoid making this Greco-Roman city a topic for a separate chapter. The place proved ideal to make a serious investigations of my thesis. I found the presence of Bacchus, the Demeter/Kore cult, a special emphasis on the Chthonic realm and an early Christ cult on the same spot. The investigation into the presence of wine in the region around the Mediterranean, have a separate chapter, but its theme visits many of the other chapters of this thesis. The two final chapters became a discussion around the Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology with a concluding chapter where I take a closer look at Orphism, touch in on Jewish mysticism with an Orphic trait and the polemical writings of the church fathers Origen and Clementine of Alexandria. Ending with a look at common iconographic usage of Bacchus/Orpheus and Jesus.

## **Use of Material**

### **Primary Sources:**

The New Testament of course, focusing a lot of my concentration on Paul's epistles since they are the oldest literary sources we have on the early cult of Christ. The Hebrew bible and some texts

from the Apocrypha will also be touched by my investigation.

Orphic fragments as they are gathered in Otto Kerns: *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, the three-volume work: *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum*, Pars 2.1-3, by A. Bernabé, and Carl R. Holladays: "Orphica" in *Fragments from hellenistic Jewish authors*. Concentrating in this instance on the Orphic texts attributed to the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Aristobulus av Phaneas, written about by, among others Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Justin Martyr, Origen/Celsus, and Eusebius Caesariensis, bishop in Caesarea. I want to do a comparison of these texts with other Orphic fragments like *the Orphic Testament*, the complex and obscure *Orphica Argonautica* i Bertnzen's: *Orfeus og tekster fra den orfiske tradisjonen*. And the hexametric poem attributed to Pseudo-Orpheus and the fragments 248 and 299 in Holladays "Orphica" (Holladay 1996).

I will also use the archaeological reports of the Hebrew University Excavation Project in Zippori, as I find them on the internet and I will look into common iconographic material shared by the Greek/Roman religion, Judaism and Christianity, with particular attention to anything of a possible Orphic nature or representing a wine cult. The strong presence of a Dionysiac iconography in the Jewish city of Sepphoris, will be of particular interest to me as I look at cultural/social exchange between these neighbouring religions.

## Background

John Block Friedman writes in his book *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* about an iconographic figure from the Hellenistic Age which he chooses to call Orpheus-Christ. He gives many examples of imagery uses of Orpheus as a picture of Christ as saviour and psychopomp, i.e. a guide through the realm of the dead to the afterlife. Friedman refers to the New Testamently texts, primarily the Gospels of John and Matthew, when he says that Orpheus was used as an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (Friedman 1970: s 43). By pacifying nature and wild beasts with his lyre, Orpheus becomes a symbol for Christ as shepherd. The iconographic finds that Friedman refers to in his book are mostly from or part of gravemonuments, Friedman explains this with Christ who herds souls out of the realm of the dead and the symbolic use of Orpheus with his similar role as psychopomp. Friedman thus not, on the other hand, see Orpheus having any other, singular, symbolic effect in antiquity. He sees no connection between the Orphic Dionysos/Bacchus-cult and its description of Orpheus as a source for inspiration and, or indeed as model for Christ as divine saviour.

## Iconographic usage of Orpheus.

To picture Orpheus as a shepherd-like player of the lyre, was not uncommon. Fritz Graf mentions a

funeral vase from Southern Italy, ca 340 BCE, that shows a singing and lyre-playing Orpheus in front of the deceased, holding a scroll (Graf og Johnston 2007:65). There has been found representations of the figure of Orpheus in Christian catacombs from the 2th century BCE in Rome. Friedman writes: "It is hard to determine whether at this time the unaltered pagan Orphism added a symbolism of his own to the composition." (Friedman 1970:43).

Friedman also writes of other Orphic frescos from 4th century B.C.E. Rome, (Ibid:48) where Orpheus is depicted with a lyre, Phrygian headdress, and two birds. Other images involve magical amulets or similiar smaller objects connected to death-rites (Ibid:65). This bears strong resemblance to the Orphic gold tablets. At the time when Friedman wrote his book the study of the gold tablets was still in its infancy (Graf og Johnston 2007:61). Friedman mentions though, a phylactery of silver foil, found in Beirut (Friedman 1970:65) invoking among others, the divinities of the seven spheres, the God of Abraham, The One God and his Christ.

I might also look into the use of Greek/Roman symbols in a synagogue in Sepphoris/Zippori. Here is the astrological zodiac depicted in the roof mosaic with the sun-god Helios in the centre. There is also excavated a pagan temple in Sepphoris whose worship is unknown, but a coin found close by shows that there were a temple in Sepphoris dedicated to Zeus and Tyche, the latter having some connections to Dionysos ( see internet reference nr 1.). In 1995 a building from the 3rd century C.E. was excavated in Sepphoris, revealing beautiful, colourful panels of mosaic depicting Orpheus. And another building from around the same time shows mosaics of Dionysos and his cult (see internet reference nr.2).

The most interesting find was excavated in 2005 by the Hebrew University Excavation Project, and is most likely from the 5th century C.E.

Extremely important is a small box, most probably an incense burner, found in Area 77.1. It is carved in limestone and decorated on its sides with various images. Traces of red on the box indicate that the object was partly or even fully painted. Although we found only half of it, this find is unique and has no parallel in the region. A crucified figure is represented on the only complete side of the broken box; a satyr playing a musical instrument and a dancing maenad appear on one broken side while a bull or ram with a tree in the background is depicted on the other [ ]. The bull, or preferably ram, who seems to be caught in the thicket and hovering above ground, resembles the Christian rendering of the sacrifice of Isaac that conjures the image of a cross; similar depictions of the animal with the tree in the background were found, for example, on several mosaic pavements decorating the churches in Jordan, giving visual expression to the Christian interpretation of the biblical story. Such a mixture of religious and secular themes adorning one object characterizes the prevailing iconographical tastes of Byzantine art. ( Davis in Zip-report 05[1] 2005: p 9, or internet reference nr.3).

The author of this excavation report calls it "a mixture of religious and secular themes", the religious images of a neighbouring religion within the region, is here simply called "secular". Is it safe to assume as the author does, that by the 5th century C.E. there were no "alien" religious movements represented in Zippori/Sepphoris? No pagan Greek/Roman influence on the Jewish town? And what of the Christians in Sepphoris, do their decorational habits show a Byzantinian

taste for the mixture of religious and secular, or are there reasons besides this for the mixing of Greek/Roman images with Christian ones? This is something I need to look into, given the, dear I say it, very Bacchic/Orphic nature of this incense burner.

## Who was Orpheus?

The ancient myths tell that Orpheus was a son of a Thracian king, or the Olympic god Apollo, and the Muse Calliope. He is a poet, a prophet and a musician who dazzles man and beasts with singing and playing the lyre, he may even move mountains. He needs to take advantage of this miraculous musical gift when trying to retrieve his wife Eurydice back from the dead. He finds his way through Hades, the Netherworld with the aid of the gods to try and plead for her return, and lead her back to the "living daylights". But to no avail, Eurydice is not to be saved. He cannot help, though warned not to, turning round to look at Eurydice as he reaches the light, not realizing that his wife is in darkness and therefore still property of Hades. Forced to see Eurydice fall into the shadows again, he returns to the surface without her.

It may be mentioned that some poets wrote of a happy ending to the love story. In the Norwegian book *Orfeus og tekster fra den orfiske tradisjonen*, the editor Omtvedt Berntzen mentions one such poet, Hermesianax from the 3rd century B.C.E. (2009: XII). We may assume that Friedman is referring to such poets, when he finds reason to denote Orpheus a successful psychopomp. We will later read about Dionysos as one such successful psychopomp, when he leads his human mother Semele from the Netherworld and instate her on Olympos among the other gods, after sharing his divinity with her.

But there is another connection between Orpheus and Dionysos, both share the destiny of being torn to pieces. This happens to Orpheus, when he, distraught with grief, shuns the company of women. Another tradition says he chooses to worship Apollo, something that enrages the female followers, maenads of Dionysos. In a crazed moment they attack him and tear him limb from limb. His head floats away to the island of Lesbos, still singing and uttering prophecies.

Orpheus is said to be the earliest Greek poet and is to have written hymns and a theogony, different to the one we know from Hesiod, (more will follow on the Orphic theogony.) He also taught rituals (*teletai*) and guided initiates into the mystery cults of, particularly Dionysos (*mysteria*). The great history writer Herodotus writes of "Orphic and Bacchic" funeral rites which he ment to be Egyptian or Pythagorean in origin, but this passage holds some uncertainty. The Jewish Orphic texts I mentioned is something I will take a closer look at in my **concluding discussion**, since they are most likely written in Alexandria by Greek-writing Jews in diaspora.

The Neoplatonists saw Orpheus as the founder of a mystery cult, which lay the foundation for the

idea of a particular "Orphism", where Orpheus is denoted as a great religious leader for the Greeks (Graf & Johnston 2007:51). This was criticized through the 19th century C.E., especially by the philologist Christian August Lobeck, who gave a moderate listings of what antiquity really knew about "Orpheus and his religious inventions" (Graf & Johnston 2007:51).

### **The Orphic gold tablets**

But then came the discovery of the first Orphic gold tablets, or leaves (*lamellae aurea*). These tablets represented a direct proof for the mysteries of Dionysos/Bacchus and the initiates' hope for the afterlife.

The first gold leaf was found in the 1830s without giving the one who discovered it a clear idea of what it was. It consisted of a thin gold foil, which in its second usage had been cut shorter and rolled up to fit inside an amulet case, hanging on a golden chain to be worn around the neck as protection against evil forces in the Underworld (Graf & Johnston 2007: 52). With the excavation of a mound in Southern Italy in 1879, two larger and three smaller texts were discovered.

Professor Domenico Comparetti saw the connection between the plates and mystery-cults, i.e. the Orphic and Bacchic. He rejected any association with Pythagoreanism or called the Orphic cult Dionysos "Zagreus", with its eschatology as a link to other texts attributed to Orpheus, and especially the Orphic anthropogony (the origin of man). (Further explanations on Zagreus and the Orphic anthropogony will follow below.)

Even if there were those who begged to differ about Comparetti's assumptions, there is no doubt his interpretation has set the frame for our way of thinking about the leaves even today. The study of Orphism had the misfortune to get tangled up in the struggle concerning church power in society and the ones who felt that Christianity was a revealed faith in contradiction with those who felt that Christianity had borrowed nearly everything from Greek/Roman paganism. Certain theologians were of the opinion that some scholars read the idea of salvation into Orphism due to Christianity. While other scholars on religion mention that Christianity shares its concern for the individual soul with many other mystery religions which evolved in Hellenistic time.

Fritz Graf writes that most scholars recognize Orphism as a religious movement, but that no one would call it a real religion, or that early Christianity might have depended on it (Graf & Johnston 2007: 65). But can we possibly claim that a religion can come into being or evolve on its own? Is there a single religion from the Middle East (or from any other parts of the world, for that matter) that has not been influenced by their neighbouring religions? Can anything develop in a vacuum?

Arve Omtvedt Berntzen, research fellow at the Department for Culture Studies and Oriental languages at the University of Oslo, has suggested to me that these Orphic gold plates represent an

amalgamation of religious, philosophical and cosmological traits typical for the 3rd century B.C.E.

Jan N. Bremmer writes about a lot of common ideas and thoughts shared by the ancient Middle Eastern religions. In his book *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Bremmer shows that many divine stories resemble and have influenced each other (Bremmer 2008). It is not unknown that religions do adopt symbols and stories from their cultural and religious neighbours. It might, on the other hand, prove difficult to decide on the origin of one religious tradition or one religious story.

### **The Hellenistic Age.**

Orphism and the Orphic mysteries represent something new in the religions of late antiquity. The common good for society is no longer the main object for most religious activities. The fate of the individual, with personal salvation after death, obtains a significant role. The individual comes into focus in the Hellenistic Age for many ancient Middle Eastern religions. Mystery cults flourish, the writing of great works of philosophy deals with issues of theogony and anthropogony. The identity of the soul, eschatology and Jewish messianism grow forth. Within Orphism we find a very early example of the important role texts (*hieroi logoi*) have in individual religiosity. To read the texts, even carry them into the afterlife, becomes a significant part of the single person's continued contact with the religious experience she had, or the religious affinity she obtained when first initiated into a religious group. In Hellenistic times Alexandrian Jews start to write religious texts in Greek, among them passages from the Hebrew Bible and several others concerning Greek and Roman gods. Certain texts present a peculiar interpretation of Orpheus as a prophet/poet who was taught monotheism by Moses and Abraham.

### **The Orphic theogony.**

The Orphic theogony tells of a different genealogical divine tree than the one presented by Hesiod. The beginning of the universe is nearly the same as the one according to Hesiod, but with the distinct difference that there is an uniting substance between Chaos and Earth. According to Hesiod Earth appears from Chaos, i.e.: nothing. How could earth come from nothing, would it not plummet through space if nothing kept it in place? This had been a matter of philosophical debate for generations (Berntzen 2009: XII). With the introduction of the heavenly spheres, the chaos of the universe is regulated. According to the Orphic theogony there is Night in the beginning, then a deity named Phanes breaks out of the cosmic egg (the sphere). In him there is all the creative power needed to bring forth the universe. Zeus has several names in the beginning, (Ouranos, The

Heavens, Knosos) giving him a special identity of being an original, universal father to everything. (This gives the Orphic texts, especially the Derveny papyrus, some monoteistic traits explaining the Jewish interest in this text. I will return to this subject during my **concluding discussion**.) Father Zeus impregnates his mother Rhea who is renamed Demeter, who then gives birth to Persephone. Zeus then rapes Persephone, (according to one source, in the guise of a snake) who gives birth to Dionysos, Zeus heir. According to the Derveny Papyrus's own commentary, Orpheus wants to show us that all the ruling gods are in reality one and the same divine principle (Berntzen 2009: XXIII). (Another monoteistic trait?)

According to one Orphic story Dionysos gets lured away by the jealous titans, the dark power from the beginning of the universe, forces of Chaos. The titans begrudge the child the throne that Zeus gave him and they disguise themselves and lures the baby away with different gifts of a symbolic nature: a cone, dolls, a spinning top, a mirror, an apple etc. They tear forthwith the god in pieces, cook and fry him before they eat him. But Athene manages to save the heart of Dionysos and she gives it to Zeus. Different traditions tell of Zeus giving the heart to Semele who swallows it, making her the second mother of Dionysos.

Zeus punishes the chthonic titans with a lightning bolt, burning them to ashes from which the human race is born. Man has therefore both a chthonic and a divine side to their nature. Thoughts of what happens after death is in this context tied to the origin of man.

Anthropogony and eschatology were inextricably joined together for the first time; the *orpheotelestai* could argue that every human had to "atone to Persephone" for the "ancient grief" from which humanity arose or risk eternal misery in the afterlife. (Graf & Johnston 2007: 93)

And we see a link between the original sin of the Judaeo/Christian belief and the Orphic "ancient grief" from which humanity sprang. By being initiated into the Orphic truth, the soul could learn how to escape the eternal cycle of reincarnation and "become a god instead of a mortal" (gold tablet nr. 3 from Thurii in Graf & Johnson 2007: 9). Another gold tablet from Thurii says: "For I also claim to be of your happy race" (gold tablet nr. 7 in Graf & Johnston 2007: 15) when addressing the Chthonian Queen (Persephone, queen of the underworld).

Maybe the gold plates may be seen as a passport in death with introductions for what the dead should answer when questioned in the Netherworld. The dead should answer when questioned: "I also claim to be of your happy race" (gold tablet nr. 7), or "my race is heavenly" (gold tablet nr. 8 from Entella, Sicily in Graf & Johnston 2007: 17). The soul is of a divine nature, and must atone its part in the slaying of this god. In doing this the initiate may be released from the bonds of reincarnation and rise through the seven heavenly spheres to freedom.

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## Theory and method

I will mostly use textual analysis and do a comparison of ancient texts. I hope to make use of the texts and compare them in their original language (ancient Greek). But I will, as I have already mentioned, wish to use archaeological finds of, particularly, iconographic material that correspond with the thesis stated above, and in so doing, demonstrate a cultural or historical affinity. Coming to this MA-project as a student of religious history, I am not a philologist and therefore not able to do a thorough study of the languages involved, i.e.: the origin of a word etc. If there is any need to look at the origin of particular words, or their linguistic development, I may have to rely heavily on the works of others.

The study of wine/vegetation cults and their influence/inspiration on human life is part of an old tradition, following the lead of James George Frazer. I may follow in the same footsteps, but will try to be accurate and conscientious in my dealings with sources, nor will I work from a reductionistic perspective.

I have also discovered through working with my thesis, how important ritual theory has become for my reading the New Testament and the different sources we have of Christian and Bacchic rites and theology. I have noticed how soon rituals have disappeared from the investigation of certain



themes and ideas when the massive work of theological doctrine have arrived on the scene to cloud the judgement. I cannot guarantee that it will not cloud my judgement as well. But I will try to implement rituals where we have sources suggesting their presence and expression.

## The wine cult of Christ

I began presenting my thesis with the claim that Christianity is a wine cult. We see it present still in the rituals of the various Christian Churches, tied to Christianity in all its religious aspects, but as we shall see it was a strong symbol in the theology and the rituals of the early cult of Christ. Wine is the force of life itself, the blood of nature, spilt when the grapes are crushed and the plant dies. A metaphor for sacrifice, and indeed it is spent as a libation offering in the old religions of the Middle East, and as I will show, it was a great part of the mother-religion of Christianity – the ancient Israelite religion.

In all the three synoptic gospels (*Mark* 14:23-5; *Matthew* 26:26-9; *Luke* 22:19-20) Jesus talks of his flesh and blood as a meal the disciples can partake of. He equates his blood with wine, inviting his followers to drink from it because it has special properties. In the *Gospel according to John*, the wine has indeed been developed into an intrinsic part of the Christ-cult's rituals. Wine permeates the entire gospel and resonates with Dionysiac/Bacchic symbols of abundance. The gospel, being so hostile to Jews and so well-versed in Hellenistic literature, is in all likelihood written by a Gentile in a pagan environment, a form of polemic against the Greco-Roman wine-god that also offered rites of an eschatological component is therefore not unexpected. In the gospel we find that the epiphany of Jesus as deity resemblance the epiphany of Dionysos, they are both revealed as deities through the revelation of wine, appearing as human guests at parties, (Jesus at the wedding-feast at Cana in *John* 2:1-11; and Dionysos in Achilleus Tatius' *De Leucippes et Clitophontis amoribus* 2.2:1-2.3:1). The liquid running through Jesus' veins is also of a particular nature, when he is pierced after death (*John*: 19:34) water and blood runs out, as if the two components of his liquid worship are already present in his body, i.e. the Eucharist; his blood, drunk as wine, and the water of baptism.

Wine was thought to have life-giving qualities – like the fruit of the vine lives on in the wine, it gives life to the people who drink it. In the ritualistic meal of the *Gospel of Matthew* (26:27), Jesus passes the cup around, ensuring his disciples that the drink shall even give them eternal life, because it is his blood they will be drinking, and warning them that unless they drink, they shall have no life in them, they will not be raised up at the last day.

In Euripides *Bacchae* (284), the god Dionysos himself is poured as a drink-offering to the other gods: «οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς» - «Himself a god he is poured in libations to gods.» Dionysos is here not only the giver of wine to mankind (*Bacchae*, 278-80, and Hesiod's *Work and days*, 614), he is the wine. According to another play by Euripides, he is the god who dwells in the wineskin (*Cyclops*, 525, 527, quoted in Leinikes 1996:177). Again he does not only reside in the wine, he is the wine. Richard Seaford (1996) writes (note 284, page 176) in his book on Euripides'

*Bacchae* that: «Because D[ionysos] is poured as wine in libations to other gods, the benefits he brings humankind are many. He is identified with wine at *Cyc.* 521-7, a passage that, like this one, reflects (or refracts) mystic instruction» (my indentation). For more on this passage from the *Bacchae*, see below, same chapter.

As written earlier, the gospels equates Jesus with this metaphor for life, his death and the drinking of his blood in the wine will give life, like the dying of the plant will ensure a continued existence in the wine-jars. Christ's body itself becomes a metaphor for life: «For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.» (*John*: 6.55-6).

In *Mark* 14:22-25, Jesus equates his whole body to the meal he shares with his disciples. The bread is his body, the wine in the cup is his blood. A new covenant that is poured out for many (14:24): «καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν, -He said: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.» I will look closer at the meaning of the blood covenant, and its resemblance to blood sacrifices in the ancient Israelite, and Greco-Roman religion.

As written earlier, does Paul seem to think that wine was more than a symbol of Jesus' blood and a new covenant, it had medicinal qualities as well. When used correctly and not in irreverent gorging at the Lord's Supper (*1 Cor.* 11.29-30), wine does not induce illnesses and deaths, but can cure sickness and strengthen the body: "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." (*1 Tim.* 5:23 King James Version). This is also the quality that wine, first and foremost, have in Euripides' *Bacchae*: It makes you forget pain (Euripides 1996: 423,727), and induces sleep (282,385), and its a medication for grief and toil (281, 283). To Alkaios (335) wine is the best medicine for evils (κάκοισι...φαρμάκων...ἄριστον...οἶνον) And in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, *Proverbs* 31:6, wine should be administered almost like an anti-depressant: «Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart.» Wine being such a potent remedy, it is not surprising that the whole meal of the Eucharist becomes a supper with great powers that may be described as «magical». «A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For all who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgement against themselves. « (*1 Cor.* 11:28-30) Having partaken of the Eucharist, the «magical» or miraculous effect of the meal could continue to work in the body, till the time of death and resurrection: «We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (*2 Cor.* 4:10)

## **Jesus, as Dionysos, a vegetation deity**

One way of looking at the role of wine in the Christ-cult is to investigate my claim that Jesus is a (just) another vegetation deity of the Hellenistic age, like Dionysos. Jonathan Smith claims that the theme of «dying and rising» is absent in the early traditions of the Christ-cult. He points to Q and the absence of Jesus' death (and/or resurrection) in iconographical sources (1990:109). Brandon (1975) argues for the same, and calls our attention to the discrepancies between the iconographic and literary sources. A discussion on this discrepancy is beyond the range of my thesis, as is the history of Christianity, but the fact remains though: The role of wine is of great importance in the early cult of Christ, and the literary sources available to me points to a deification of the Christ-figure using, among its «tools», comparisons to vegetation-images, both in contrast and equation to the cult-figures already present. I will return to the question of wine in the chapter on Corinth, where we will see that Smith (1990) argues for the «dying and rising» Christ-story as part of the change that Christ-cults removed from their locative perspective underwent. A change, which Smith calls a shift from locative to Utopian perspective which all the Mediterranean religions in late Antiquity had in common. This would of course entail certain implications for the interpretation of, among other, the Demeter/Kore cult. Implications that the eschatological aspect of the cult was absent from the cult at Eleusis in its locative setting, but present when the cult had spread its worship to other places.

Resistance to denote Dionysos a «dying and rising» deity is present in Wagner (1967: 67), he says that: «we can only speak of a «resurrection» in the most symbolical sense of the term.» He claims that the votaries of the deity may have harboured hopes for immortality, but this was through an «assimilation into the godhead... at the moment of ecstasy» and not in rituals of death and rebirth. Still we cannot say that the gold lamellae mentioned earlier refers to ecstasy in rituals, when they speak on behalf of the dead, expecting a release from the pangs of death («You have become a god instead of a mortal», tablet nr.3 in Graf and Johnston (2007):7) through their claim (line 3, tablet nr. 5, Ibid: 13) of being of the same divine race as the deities encountered in Hades. «Rebirth» is perhaps the last thing they hoped for, (through Orphic belief in reincarnation), but a blissful afterlife is intimated («now you have died and now you have come into being» line 1, tablet nr. 26 a,b Ibid:37)

Wagner quotes Nilsson (Wagner 1967: n.22, p.67), who withheld that the hopes for a blissful afterlife cannot be compared to a resurrection, because the (Roman) Bacchic mystae was «content with the Dionysos of the common myth», and cared not for the child killed by the Titans, (see introduction). This does not explain why line 2 of tablet nr. 26 a,b, as mentioned earlier, says: «Tell Persephone that the Bacchic One himself released you», i.e released the deceased from the old

titanic blame, and therefore ensured a reinstatement among the deities and heroes.

I will therefore persist in investigating the evidence for my claim by looking at the many comparisons of Jesus with vegetation found in early Christian literature, in communication with sources on Dionysos. In this connection I will also look at the idea of man equated with dying and rising vegetation in Christianity, found particularly in the epistles by Paul. Within the question of Jesus being a vegetation deity, comes the issue of the many equations of Christ with eschatological meals. This incorporates the topic of Jesus as wine.

### The Vine as tree

The role of wine is of great importance in the Gospel of John, as seen earlier. In 15.1, Jesus makes the rather warning statement that the (only) true vine is himself and the farmer that will bring forth the fruit of this tree, is his (heavenly) Father: ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινὴ καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ γεωργός ἐστίν. It is a caution not to worship other wine cults. The god Yahweh is the one who has brought forth the plant, and Christ is its one true fruit. If there is another god who is associated with the vine, its fruit is not only harmful, but false.

«...Dionysos in his earliest form is not the god who is wine or even the god who brings wine, but rather the god who is the vine.» (Leinieks 1996: 178). Leinieks goes on to say that for Theophrastus in the *Investigations of plants* (1.3.1) the vine is a tree. In the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament verse of *Judges* 9:13, we have trees trying to appoint a king among themselves to be ruler over all the other trees, here is the vine equated with a tree as well: «But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, Which cheers both God and men, And go to sway over trees?」

The connection of Dionysos and the vine is clearly exhibited by his many cult names, Leinieks mentions some in his book *The City of Dionysos* (p.179): «Ανθιος «with blossoms»; βότρυς «bunch of grapes»; βρισεύς «heavy with fruit; Πρόβλαστος «of sprouting»; Φλεύς, Φλοιός «abundant», among others. In poetry Dionysos is likewise compared to a vine tree, Leinieks (Ibid:180) quotes these : ἄμπελόεις «of the vine»; βοτρυηφόρος, φερεστάφυλος «grape-bearing»; ἔλινοφόρος «with tendrils»; ἐριστάφυλος, πολυστάφυλος «rich in grapes»; εὐκαρπος, κάρπιμος, φερέκαρπος» fruitful», from Karl Bruchmann's *Epitheta deorum quae apud poetas graecos leguntur* (Leipzig, 1893). In the *Bacchae* Dionysos let clusters of grapes grow in the sacred precinct of Semele (Euripides 1996: 11-12), and it is said of him that he brings forth vines and grapes for the sake of men in general (651). He brings forth milk, sweet wine and honey in every mountain-brook (140-145).

As seen earlier in the *Book of Revelations* (1:18-20), the fruit of the vine is turned into blood in the press of the wrath of God, it is harvest time on the Day of Judgement. In Diodorus Siculus (3.62.7)

it is the god Dionysos that is sacrificed to bring forth wine at harvest time. Burkert (1985:238, and n.14,p. 441) writes that Late Hellenistic allegorists are the first to say openly that the god Dionysos was killed to serve as libation wine, referring to Diodorus Siculus and Cornutus, but that it might very well be a much older myth, belonging to the secret mysteries and their stories. Diodorus Siculus lived in the first century B.C.E., and in 3.62.7 he writes that Dionysos is thought to be the wine, since his mother and father (Demeter and Zeus) earth and rain, respectively, are necessary to bring forth the vine. He goes on to say that the story of Dionysos being torn apart becomes the harvesting of the grapes in the labourers mind. That the story tells of the god's body being boiled is understandable since the people generally boil their wine before mixing it to improve the flavour. The myth of Dionysos suffering at the hands of the titans is explained by Diodorus Siculus as a nature-metaphor. Farmers equates the god with the crops of the land, torn apart like the grapes are torn of the vine and crushed, and then boiled like the wine is boiled. The wine being drunk and given in libation to the other gods resonates in Euripides' *Bacchae* (284), where Dionysos is indeed given as a drink-offering to the gods. That the god walks about in the play to avenge his (other) human-mother's bad reputation, is not a problem, Dionysos can be in two places at once. A youth-like man with sweet-smelling hair, and a blood-red liquid in the drinking-cup.

Richard Seaford (1996) writes that this myth of Dionysos «(notably his dismemberment) were interpreted in the mysteries as referring to the production of wine: D.S.3.62.7. Line 284 from the *Bacchae*: «οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς», finds an echo in Paul's *second epistle to Timothy* 4.6: ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἀναλύσεώς μου ἐφύσθηκεν - For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.» Paul speaks here of his own death, he is to be sacrificed, but a crown of righteousness awaits him after death. Because he has served God, he considers even his last action, his death, as a sacrifice to God. It is worth noting that Paul does not equate himself to an animal being offered, but the vegetable and rejuvenating wine drink. Maybe we can interpret this as a another sign of the importance of wine in the cult of Christ.

But this is of course not the only cult who offered eternal life through the initiates drinking wine, we have the cult of Bacchus, which emphasized rituals focusing on wine, the spilt blood of the god Dionysos. We have already seen a description of an Attic black-figured pelike from Naples, where two initiates are welcomed into the cult, partaking of a banquet focusing on bread and wine. The god is strongly associated with the vine and its fruit, as we have seen in the story of harvesting that Diodorus Siculus wrote about. The farmers involved in the wine-making mimicked the god being slayed and boiled, and in drinking the god they may have experienced a unification with Dionysos and his divine powers. And particularly so for the devotees of the god, that had undergone an

initiation. This initiation might have been Orphic, but I will return to this below.

### **Water of Life and wine into water.**

Jesus is not only equated with the blood-giving Tree of the vine, but the Water of Life. Again it is the *Gospel of John* that presents Jesus as a liquid food-stuff, this time living water that will leave the drinker unthirsty for ever (4:10-15). This water will become like a spring within the drinker, welling up to eternal life. This water has miraculous qualities indeed. In Ferguson's *Early Baptism in the Church*, he writes about another kind of miraculous water. He lists various initiation-, especially baptismal-, practices in the different early Churches: «Sethians, however, had their own ritual practices, apparently including a water rite. There are traces of a ritual structure in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Reference is made to the «Water of Life» with the further explication that the divine Christ descended for the sake of the spirit (or highest self) «which has come to exist out of the water of life and out of the baptism [or bath] of the mysteries».» (his brackets, 2009: 291).

He tells of another story from the Nag Hammadi Library, where there is a strong emphasis on the ritual power of the baptismal water. He quotes from Violet MacDermot's book *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*: «Jesus caused his disciples to be clothed with linen garments and amidst ritual actions sealed them with the Seal (2.45 [106-107]). Wine in pitches became water, and Jesus baptized the disciples, gave them from the offering, and sealed them.» (Ibid:297). Here the disciples are washed in the Lord, since they are washed in the water that Jesus transforms from wine. It is a reversal of the wine miracle from the wedding of Cana (*John* 2:3). Christ gives here a much more potent baptism than the one administered by John the Baptist, he does not only baptize in water, but wine, a symbol of his blood. The story conveys the lustrative qualities of the Christian initiation rite of baptism, only here in a Gnostic setting. I will return to the rite of baptism below in the chapter on Christian and Bacchic theology and rituals.

In the gold lamellae of the Bacchic *mystai* there is a Lake of Memory encountered in the Underworld, that will not only quench the thirst of the deceased if they are among the initiates of Bacchus and have said the right password, but having drunk, the dead Bacchoi «will rule among the other heroes» (Tablets 1 and 2 in Graf and Johnston 2007:5,7) In tablet 26 a,b, mentioned earlier, wine is waiting for the dead Bacchoi: «You have wine as your fortunate honor». (Ibid: 37) The liquid the initiates will partake of is of a beneficial nature, the water in the Lake of Memory is truly the Water of Life as it gives the Bacchoi eternal (after)life in bliss among gods and heroes under the protection of the Chthonic goddess Persephone. The wine mentioned in tablet 26 must indeed be the last echo of the Dionysiac rituals for the Bacchic initiate.

### **Vegetation symbols in the *Epistles of Paul***

Paul uses a lot of vegetation symbols to describe man and the «dying and rising» followers of Christ in his epistles. In the *letter to the Romans* 7:4 Paul equates man to a plant that needs to die in order to bear fruit: «So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.» And in *Rom.8:22*, Paul calls the earliest followers of Christ the firstfruits of the Spirit. In 11:16-25, it is all the people of God that is compared to a tree. The Gentiles that Paul is addressing in *Rome* are referred to as a wild olive shoot grafted into the old olive root of Israel. But they should be careful not to boast that some Jewish groups (the natural branches) have been broken of the root because of unbelief to make room for the new ones, because it is the root that support them, this new branch, and not they who support the root: «After all, if you were cut off an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.»

In *1 Cor.15:36* the difficult notion of resurrection is explained by Paul with harvesting-symbols. «What you sow does not come to life unless it dies, when you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or something else». The plant must die to come to life again. This mimics the idea of the covenant, or the testament from *Mark 14:24*; *Matthew 26:28*; *Luke 22:20* that we will have a closer look at in the chapter of Christian and Bacchic theology and rituals. In these verse the blood of Christ in the cup is presented as a new covenant, and as we know, for a (new) testament to become valid there must be a death, not only must Jesus die, so must his believers. The followers of Christ are the beneficiaries of this will, but to receive what is entailed to them they will not only have to accept the covenant by drinking it, they will need to die to enjoy the eternal life promised in the will.

### **Wine and the Corinthians**

There will come a chapter on Corinth because this offers a unique opportunity to study the development of the Christ cult in a pagan environment, not forgetting the special emphasis there was on funerary rituals and the Chthonic realm there, but I will return to this below, now to the letters of Paul.

Paul warns the Corinthians from participating in pagan sacrifices as well as the Christian meal: «You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.» (*1 Cor.10:21*) Yet he does not want the Corinthians to think that he considers that «a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything.» (*1 Cor.10:19*). If they must participate in other «dinner parties» they should remember to thank the



rightful God. «Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God» (10:31-2). Emphasizing what those rites accomplish positions him to take the Corinthians to task for their inconsistency, some show solidarity with the early church by participating in its common meal – sharing the cup and breaking the bread (10:16-7)- yet continue to dine in pagan temples, thereby acknowledging a second allegiance (8:10;10:20-1). When we take a closer look at the Greek text of *I Cor.* 10:21: «οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων» (*I Cor.* 10:21 (Blue Letter Bible: MGNT - Morphological Greek New Testament, my underlining), we see that the word for demon are *daimonion*, a word that can mean divine, godlike, in Euripides *Bacchae* verse 894 it means god, or it can denominate an inferior race of divine beings, or demons. It can also mean evil spirits, which is perhaps the way the word is interpreted today, particularly in the Pauline context. It is worth noting this change of meaning, because it bears significance on the change that Orpheus, (which was considered a godly man) underwent in the writings of the early church, and how the words *daimonion* (godlike, inferior race of divine beings) and *daimon* (god, goddess, deity) merged into one modern concept of evil being, denoting fallen angels, or the Devil himself. I will return to what the change of the concept *daimon* has meant for the «reputation» of the Greek deities, and in particular Dionysos.

Paul's need to chastise the Corinthians, shows the varied ways the early disciples of Christ interpreted Christ's teachings and indeed the whole cult. The dining at the Eucharist was to some of the Corinthians just the same as partaking in dining cults at the pagan temples. We must understand that Paul's version of events is just one way of interpreting Christ.

Paul stresses the clean break and new allegiance that ritual signals in his retelling of the Israelites' Exodus and Wilderness experience – a thinly veiled reference to baptism and eucharist (10:1-5). Emphasizing what those rites accomplish positions him to take the Corinthians to task for their inconsistency: some show solidarity with the early church by participating in its common meals – sharing the cup and breaking the bread (10:16-17) – yet continue to dine in pagan temples, thereby acknowledging a second allegiance (8:10; 10-20-1) (DeMaris 2008:31)

Richard E. DeMaris sees the Corinthian failure to show only one consistent allegiance, either to the early church, or to pagan cults, as the quite understandable difficulty that some believers must have had in severing ties with family and friends, «to shift existing social obligations, such as meeting and dining with friends or family at a local temple» (Ibid:31). Why should this practice be seen as social obligations merely, if the same participants could, or in Paul's opinion, should view the common meal of the early church as something more meaningful, or sacred than the pagan dining at temples? DeMaris, being occupied with ritual theory, striving to see actions and rituals in its historical and social context, fails to suggest that some of the Corinthians Paul chastise could

have confused the two drinking rituals. Maybe the other drinking ritual at the pagan temple of Dionysos could be interpreted as something similar as the breaking of bread and passing the cup of wine at the Lord's Supper for these early churchgoers. Maybe Paul's way was just one of the many ways of interpreting the teachings and messages of Christ. When we know that another cult that also practised sharing a meal, and drinking wine, as well as spreading a message of hope for the soul in the afterlife, it could have been difficult for the Corinthians to choose which to put their faith in. Is it unlikely that the Corinthians, who failed to show allegiance to the early church only, was safeguarding their options?

Even though DeMaris writes that all the rites of the early church, «either displaced, overturned or reversed existing ritual patterns» (Ibid: 33), he considers the Corinthian context of rituals as a Jewish one, seeing the «Eucharistic (symbolic) blood drinking as violating Isralite dietary laws (*Deuteronomy* 12:16) and baptism as replacing circumcision as a marking of group affiliation (Ibid:33), he does not see Paul's warning against pagan temple-practices as a part of the development of the Lord's Supper. It seems as if DeMaris thinks that the Gentile churchgoers had only adopted (more or less successfully) these two rituals that had replaced Jewish ones, without helping to develop them. Did not the way the receivers of Paul's educational letters read and answered (in modifying actions) the letters, have any impact on these rituals, especially in how they were perceived and thought of? I think that the Gentiles had a lot to do with the development of the Eucharist, this ritual that bears such striking resemblance to the wine-drinking ceremonies in other Hellenistic wine cults.

DeMaris writes that Paul wanted to set the rites of the early church above other rituals, and he did so by introducing headcovering regulations, for more about these regulations and their relationship with the rites of Dionysos, see the chapter of **Corinth**. In the *Bacchae* Pentheus' cuts off the long hair of the Stranger (Dionysos) (Leinieks 1996:227), long hair being a cult object in Dionysiac worship *ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος· τῷ θεῷ δ' αὐτὸν τρέφω*.- «The hair is sacred. I let it grow for the god.» (verse 494). This could perhaps explain why Paul wants the men to have short hair, and why he dismisses any argument on his regulations: *1Cor*. 11:14 says: «Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him...? If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God».

Sufficed to say, DeMaris seems to be considering the Corinthians as a small group of followers of the early Christ cult who had their own way of doing things, but who suffered great pressure from family and society around. It does not seem to accure to him that they might have been people that not only worshipped at two (for Paul) conflicting cult places, but adhered to several cults at once,

what they actually believed in is even harder, if not impossible for us to decipher.

### **From drinking-party to Eucharist.**

[I]n the Greek and Jewish systems man's condition and the specific occasion determined – and were expressed through – the choice of victim and the nature of the sacrifice, in Christianity man's condition was communicated to God directly, without a victim being the mediator on the path to God. Before the establishment of the cultic act of Christian communion, the focus of Christianity was on human actions and life attitudes. And it was a feature original to Christianity that the abolition of the animal victim was not necessarily connected to vegetarianism, at least in the form of Christianity which prevailed in the following centuries. (Petropoulou 2008:283-284)

As we saw in my introduction, the identification of Jesus with wine and bread could lead to misunderstandings, if not downright excesses, where the cult of Christ was, according to Paul, reduced to a mere feast of eating and drinking, or symposium as we might venture to call the Lord's Supper. According to Paul's first letter, the Corinthians (11:17-22) have mistaken this ritual meal for any other symposium. The Lord may have been accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (*Matt*:11.19), but this should not mean that the ones partaking of his Supper should behave in such a way as to give rise to the same kind of accusations. When it is the body of the Lord you are feasting on, you do not gorge yourself (*1Cor*:11:29-30), Paul goes even so far as to claim that this irreverent behaviour may have caused illness and deaths among the Corinthians.

Symposium or συμπόσιον means drinking-party or, in some cases, entertainment. The striking resemblance between the cults of Christ and cults of Dionysos does not stop at the emphasis on wine connected to both deities, but even the way the meals were conducted. The symposium was common for the whole of the Mediterranean, and had been for a very long time when the gospels were written.

The people of the Mediterranean world of the period circa 300 B.C.E. to circa 300 C.E. tended to share the same dining customs. That is, the banquet as a social institution is practiced in similar ways and with similar symbols or codes by Greeks, Romans, Jews, Egyptians, and so on. (Smith 2003: 35)

This included the custom of reclining at table (*Mark* 2:15; 6:39; 8:6; 14:3,18 and *Luke* 7:36; 11:37; 14:7; 24:30), washing of the feet before reclining (*Luke* 7:44; *John* 13:3-5), anointing the head with perfumes (*Mark* 14:3) sharing a wine libation (*Mark* 14:23), and ending the meal with a hymn (*Mark* 14:26), not to forget the function of the meal-ritual to combine the sacred and the secular. We see this in the general Greco-Roman banquets where «it was customary to offer libations or prayers to the gods no matter how «secular» was the overall situation.» (Ibid:6). This would go far to explain why the Corinthians find it difficult to see anything different in the libation and formal meal of the Christ-symposium, and why they failed to introduce a new set of rules of conduct. Untoward

behaviour could occur at «pagan» symposia as well, with drinking competitions, acrobats and flute girls. Xenophon writes of one symposium where the festivities are concluded with a mimic dance in which the god of the wine just drunk is portrayed in a romantic sequence with his Ariadne.

Xenophon writes that this aroused the banqueters to such a degree that: «those of them who were unmarried swore that they would wed, those who were wedded mounted their horses and galloped off to join their wives, in quest of married joys.» (Xenophon 9.7 at

<[http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1444847&pageno=57](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1444847&pageno=57)>).

While the passage in Xenophon tells of a particular symposium, there is no reason to suppose that the club banquets differed much from each other. The presence of the god of wine is an important part of the banquet, as is the presence of Christ in the memorial meals in Christianity. The gatherings of the Christ-followers seems to have had the same outline as the Greco-Roman banquet clubs that gathered in the honour of one or several gods. Pliny the Younger classifies the Christians as a *hetaeria* – association or club (10.96, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/pliny.ep10.html>>), and Dennis Smith (2003:105-6) writes: «In Palestine, for example, the Qumran sect had organizational aspects similar to those of Greco-Roman clubs. The same can be said of the organization of early Christianity as it spread over the eastern Mediterranean.»

In the description of the Lord's Supper in the gospels, Jesus seems to fill the role of the *quinquennalis* at the symposium. This person acts as host and provide the things needed for the feast (which Jesus says he will do in *John* 14:2-4), prepare bath facilities, and perform a ritual ceremony with incense and wine, dressed in a special white garment (Smith 2003:100). The white garment brings the mind Bacchic funerary rituals, intimated by the grave-find from Timpone Grande talked of in Graf and Johnston's *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife* (2007:160), where a white shroud was found laid over the cremated remains of the dead. It seems also reminiscent of the cloth draped around the masked cloumn on the Lenaia Vases, mentioned by Burkert (1985:240). The white garment appears to have been an important part in baptismal ceremonies, as well. See earlier in this chapter and in the chapter on **the Christian and Bacchic theology and rituals**.

Jesus has also the role of «symposiarch» which mixes the wine in the big bowl in the centre of the room, he is the host at the feast as well as the deity present. An interesting feature of the symposium is that the banquet could be a meal surrounded by religious rituals. Ramsay MacMullen (1981:39) tells of iconographic representations of deities being brought to the feast. This could be a statue, a doll or a mask brought out of its house and laid on a couch beside the celebrants. The icon of the god is present at the feast and plays the role of host.

Aelius Aristides, the rhetor, reminds his listeners that «in sacrificing to this god [Sarapis] alone men keenly share a vivid feeling of oneness while summoning him to their hearth an setting him at their head as guest and diner... [He is ] the fulfilling participant in all cult associations who rank as leader of toasts (symposiarch) among them whenever they

assemble. (Aristides *Or* 8.54,1, quoted in MacMullen 1981: 38)

MacMullen talk of drunken and erotic orgies in the Greco-Roman world that influenced Christian graveside meals (Ibid:40), it is natural to ask then if the icon-figure of the deity was present? MacMullen describes that contact was made with the deities through touching the statue or image, if the god did not live there it could be brought there through prayer and entreaty. We may ask if this would attach special meaning to the drinking vessels and amphoras, decorated with images of Dionysos or Bacchic rituals. «Whether or not they fitted exactly, whether they looked like their portraits in stone or wood, they were to be found inside.» (Ibid:60) If Dionysos and /or Christ is present in the wine and in the icons brought to the feast, we can truly talk of the deities being the host of the feast, hallowing the banquet of worship and therefore giving it special meaning, unlike Ramsay's conclusion: «at festal meals, as at teletai of dancing and music, the wine, women, and song satisfied wants more simple and secular» (Ibid:57) than needs for immortality and contact with the gods. Yet he proclaims that the victory of Christianity came through the «converts seeking reality, seeking truth» (Ibid:95) and that no pagan cult promised an afterlife that the worshipper felt concerned them, «[r]esurrection in the flesh was thus a truth proclaimed to the decisive advantage of the Church» (Ibid:137).

However, resurrection was difficult for the Christ-cult adherents to understand or believe in. Some of the Corinthians even say that there is no resurrection of the dead (*1Cor.* 15:12), and knowing well how fast the body deteriorates they ask Paul what kind of body they will have (15:35). Paul comforts them and say they will be raised to an imperishable body (15:42) and they will have the flesh of man, not of fish or any other kind of animal (15:39). Was thoughts like these uniquely Corinthian, or can we venture to claim that the concept of resurrection in the flesh was difficult to fathom for most of the average church-goer? And that this might explain some of the discrepancies between the Christian literature and the iconographic tradition.

Like we have seen, the description of the Greco-Roman symposium in Smith's book *From Symposium to Eucharist* brings the similarities between the communal meal of the Christ cult and the banquet clubs to light. He argues that the use of wine in the Corinthian church functioned as a binding component in a fellowship, to share wine ties the participants together. Wine is not then a spiritual drink but a way to ensure the companionship of the group. Fellowship in the church is very important in most of the letters of Paul, because it went far to ensure a future existence for the cult. As we can read in the statutes of the Iobakchoi that Smith renders in his book (2003: pp. 129-131) any differences between members should be reconciled within the club (line 86-88), and not to be brought outside the club, the same goes for the Corinthians (*1Cor.* 6:1), and there are rules against

chattering and unruly conversation (lines 107-110) and (*1Cor.* 14:26-33).

I will end this discussion on the symposium by looking at why the banquet of the Christ-followers got the name κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, or the «Lord's Supper», and the aspect of ecstatic prophesying at the banquet. Paul refers to the meal that the community of Corinth shares (*1Cor.*11:20), signaling that the «symposiarch» is none other than the Lord, he is the host, and present at the meal. And maybe not only as the founder of the feast, but present in the kind of memento he asked his disciples to remember him by, he is there in flesh (and blood) in the wine and bread that the Corinthians are enjoying so irreverently (*1 Cor.*11:17-22). The supper was instigated by the Lord, but the Lord is present there not only as host, but in the numinous food the cult-followers are eating and drinking.

There is another side to the symposia in the Christ-cult at Corinth we have not looked at yet, namely ecstatic prophecy. Paul calls this a powerful gift, including the possibility to convict unbelievers of their sins (*1 Cor.*14:24), because the secrets of the unbeliever's hearts were disclosed to the prophet (14:25), yet Paul chooses (14:9) to play down the ecstatic aspect of prophecy, speaking in tongues, saying it is not beneficial for the church since it is unintelligent without an interpreter (14:5), and sounding to an outsider like the ravings of a crazy person (14:23). In *Acts.* 2:13 speaking in tongues is compared to drunken ravings. It is easy to think that this could lead to unruly behaviour quite against the stipulations of a banqueting club. But there might be another reason Paul wishes to play down the ecstatic side to the gatherings. In the Bacchic cult, wine, and its god can induce prophetic powers. Ecstatic utterances are associated with Dionysiac worship (Euripides 1996: v. 298-305) inspired by the god and his gift of wine: «The god is a prophet. Revelry and frenzy possess prophecy. Whenever the god comes into the body copiously, he makes the frenzied speak the future.» (Euripides (v. 298-301) translated in Leinieks 1996: 80) If the Corinthians already found it difficult to distinguish between the Christ cult and its rituals and neighbouring pagan cults, it is perhaps not surprising that Paul wished to separate and discern the activities in the Christian cult from similar cults around.

## Corinth

### Paul and the Corinthian Christ cult.

As we saw in the chapter **The wine cult of Christ**, we have a lot of information about the early churches in Corinth. Archaeological evidence and the letters of Paul give us a unique insight into the development of the cult of Christ. This warrants a chapter of its own, particularly so because the focus and emphasis on the realm of the dead seems to have been of particular importance to the Corinthians. The bulk of Paul's extensive correspondence with the Corinthians tells of a highly inquisitive and conflicted community of believers. People who found it easy to incorporate new cultic content into old pagan rituals, while others found it difficult to sever all ties to the religious world of the temples they were ment to stay away from. And still others, as I will claim, who found the new cult so similar to the cults they had been frequenting that they saw it not as a competition but a complement to their religious lives. Why else would the Corinthians find it prudent to attend the rituals of the «dumb idols» (τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ ἄφωνα) by whom they had earlier «been carried off» (ὥς ἂν ἤγεσθε ἀπαγόμενοι) (*1Cor.12:2*).

Margaret Mitchell writes in her chapter «Paul's Letters to Corinth» (2005) that since the Church in Corinth consisted mainly of Gentiles «the first step for Corinthian would-be Christians joining Paul's group of self-styled «holy ones», «called ones» (ἅγιοι, κλητοί; [called saints] or «brothers and sisters» (ἀδελφοί), was the rejection of the «dumb idols»...» (309-10) in the pagan temples. But Paul complains of their poor success in doing so. They continue (*1 Cor.10:21*) to partake of the cup of demons (daimonion), and their behaviour at the Lord's Supper is irreverent to the extent that some have feasted so much they are drunk when others have barely started their meal, others still are humiliated because they have nothing (*1Cor.11.29-30*). Paul chastise them for sinning against the body and blood of Christ.

In fact, the Corinthians are chastised by Paul on a number of occasions for continuing their pagan worship, or for implementing pagan rituals in the activities of the church. One passage seems to suggest that the Corinthians continued some kind of revelry containing elements of sexual immorality: «Do not be idolaters, as some of them were, as it is written: «The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - (*1Cor.10:7-8*).

But Paul is met with scepticism, to the extent that he is accused of trying to line his own pocket (*2 Cor.10:2*) and they think him inferior, preferring what Paul calls a different gospel from «super-apostles», preaching about «a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached (*2 Cor.11:3-5*). They have

been deceived like Eve was by the cunning serpent. Who is this other Jesus, dare we interpret it to be an Orphic Bacchus, or is it merely evidence of the many different versions of Jesus-cults around at the time? And did Paul mean to draw a link between a cunning serpent and this other Jesus? The thought is interesting enough, when the cult of the Chthonic Dionysos is symbolized by a serpent, and that the Corinthians were very preoccupied with the Chthonic and the underworld, as we shall see. Paul goes on to say: «For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself, masquerades as an angel of light.»

(2Cor.11:13-4)

Again and again, Paul urges the Corinthians to give up their «dumb idols». 1Cor.10:14 says that eating of the «same» bread that is the body of Christ unites all his followers, so they do not need the communion with idols: «Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people, judge for yourselves what I say». But he cannot prevent them from sharing in cultic meals where the meat has been part of a pagan sacrifice, since there are people «still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol» (1Cor.8:7). He argues that there may well be many gods in heaven or on the earth, but there is only one God, and one Lord Jesus, so it is of no consequence if there has been a sacrifice or not, the food does not represent a contact with one of these gods. But since it might encourage «weak-minded» people to think that idolatry is permissible, they should refrain from eating meat from pagan sacrifices (1Cor.8:1-13).

However, Paul says a little later, in 1Cor.10:18 that eating of the sacrifices can entail participating at the altar, like it does when the people of Israel eat of a sacrifice to God. An idol is nothing, «but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons», and participating would mean an allegiance with the *daimonions*. We see here how difficult it was for the Corinthians to give up their «demonic» allegiances. DeMaris (2008:31) calls this family pressure, but as I will show the similarity to the cults already present at Corinth may well have led to confusion, if not a mental equation of the cults available in the minds of the followers.

In Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians (2Cor.6:14) it is time to sever the ties to unbelievers and Paul even asks what is common between the true cult of Christ and the demons: «Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does an unbeliever have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?». It would appear that the unbelievers who claimed allegiance to other cults as well as the one of Christ, felt there were enough «agreement» to safeguard their options.



Does Paul refer to the nocturnal rituals of the Bacchus-followers in this passage? And is the verse from 2Cor.11:14 about Satan masquerading as an angel of light a kick in the same direction?

Margaret Mitchell concludes her chapter «Paul's letters to Corinth», with proposing some questions for further investigation when it comes to the topic of affinities between Corinthian Christian religious life and that of Greco-Roman cults. She asks firstly if there can be found a parallel to the strong emphasis on literary engagement in the early Corinthian church in other religious associations. As I will show in this chapter, the presence of Bacchic cults suggest so, given the importance of the literature for «the beggar priests of Orpheus» (Plato364b-365a, cf. Burkert 1985: 297). The travelling priests of the Orpheus «sold» their message to families over the Greco-Roman world, therefore we find evidence of Orphic belief in as varied places as Italy, Sicily, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, and no doubt Egypt. I will return to this in the chapter **Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology**.

Margaret Mitchell writes that «most scholars believe the Corinthian Christians assembled for their «lordly supper» and worship service in private homes. Would these Christian «house churches» have been the only Corinthian religious associations to have done so?» (Ibid: 337) As we saw in the chapter **The wine cult of Christ**, the lord's supper does not seem to differ much from the average *thiasoi* or symposium. Lewis (1995) writes in his chapter «Barber's Shops and Perfume Shops, «Symposia without wine»» in *The Greek World* that: «[t]he *symposion* was a private drinking-party, usually involving a small group of friends meeting regularly at the house of the host, at which ritualized drinking and entertainment, intellectual or otherwise, took place» (p.437). It was a place to engage in discussion as much as a place to worship. Lewis writes that the symposium was originally associated with aristocracy and wealth, but that at the end of the fifth century B.C.E., the symposia had begun to spread to other classes as well (Ibid:438). This would explain how the cult of Christ attracted followers from the rich to the poor. Like the Bacchic groups (Wagner 1967) or the groups founded on the writings of Orpheus (Plato *Republic* 364e, cf. Parker 1995:483), Paul founded various cells of the Christ cult who met in the private houses of wealthy Corinthians.

How else would the participants of the symposium have a roof to offer the Jesus-followers, or the money to spend on wine? But the division at table that Paul chastise must also be related to the different socioeconomic levels of the participants (Walters 2005:417). Yet the evidence is not conclusive: «The status of those Christians met on their travels were fairly high, at least according to Luke-Acts. It becomes higher in the fantasies of the authors of the apocryphal acts of the second century, who lay strong emphasis on the class and status of contacts and converts.» (Markus 1980:22).

Women have a strong place in Corinthian worship as the presence of the Demeter/Kore, Bacchic, and Isis cults show, yet Paul orders that women are to take a submissive role in the church: «As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?» (1Cor.14:33-36).

Why must Paul give directions on this, and why are the Corinthians so obstinate? Maybe had the women taken the leading role like in the mystery cults of Demeter, Dionysos and Isis. The Corinthians, Paul warns, should not feel free to do things in their own way, to think they have the «copyright» of how to be a church. And if anybody disagrees with Paul on a position of leadership, he shall be the one to be ignored, not Paul. Paul asserts his power here, he huffs and he puffs, yet the Corinthians persist in doing things their own way. I wonder if this concerned the matter of women exerting a prominent role in the worship, and how long this may have lasted.

### **The evidence of Dionysos and Demeter/Kore cults.**

Since I wish to investigate my claim that Bacchic cults helped shape the early Christ cult in Corinth, I will now look at the evidence we have of Dionysos-worship here, I will do this in discussion with the Christ cult in Corinth.

We do not only find traces of Bacchic worship in Corinth, we find that Dionysos had a special relationship to the city. Burkert (1985) writes that according to tradition it was Arion who invented the *dithyrambos* there, religious hymns dedicated to the god performed in Dionysiac revelry. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. burlesque scenes of Dionysian orgies in Corinthian vase painting became extremely popular, depicting «Fat dancers, whose mummery suggests a grotesque nakedness... dancing, drinking wine, and playing all sorts of tricks» (Ibid:290). Burkert writes that it was in the same period that the family clan of the *Bacchiadae*, who traced their ancestry back to Dionysos, was overthrown by the tyrant Kypselos (*Papyri Oxyrhynchus* 2465, fr.3.ii, cf. Burkert 1985:n.5, p.460).

When it comes to Orpheus we find him present at Corinth when Jason dedicates the ship Argo to Poseidon, according to Dio Chrysostom 37.15

([http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio\\_Chrysostom/Discourses/37\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/37*.html)) it was Orpheus that wrote the dedication.

Elizabeth Gebhard writes about the rites for Melikertes-Palaimon at Corinth, and says that this seagod is sometimes seen in connection with Dionysos (Gebhard 2005:167), and sometimes identified with the harbour god Portunus. Portunus again, with his mother Ino «are at all periods

associated with the infant Dionysos» (Ibid:167). Palaimon was initially a mortal child, which parents gave protection to the child Dionysos, till Hera found out and avenged herself in a gruesome way (Kerenyi 1976:246). Burkert 1985 (p.137) says there were a nocturnal mystery-cult surrounding the dead boy.

The Romans thrashed the city in 146 B.C.E. and it has been claimed that it left the city abandoned (Dio Cassius 21, Zonaras), but archaeological finds contradicts this, claiming that there were Greek citizens who stayed on, it is therefore interesting to see if any worship of Greek gods, particularly Dionysos survived there. According to Nancy Bookidis there is evidence that show that Bacchic worship continued. She writes in her chapter in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* that a monopteros on the north side of the forum, may have been dedicated to either Artemis/Diana or Dionysos/Bacchus: «Suggestive of the latter may be the over life-size marble head of Dionysos found nearby» (Bookidis 2005: 153). Bookidis suggests that the cult of Dionysos, alone (as the development of dithyramps indicates), or in the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore was peculiarly Corinthian. Dionysos continued to have a strong place in Corinth, in a cult of his own but also in connection to the chthonic Demeter/Kore cult that had the same cast in Roman Corinth as before, and in the focus on the underworld. This continued long after the Christian church had secured a place among the cults on offer. In the coastal townlet of Isthmia temples dedicated to Demeter, Persephone, Dionysos and Artemis from the first and second century C.E. have been unearthed. DeMaris writes that there was in addition a site dedicated to Hades, a Plutoneion, which are very rare in Greece (Ibid:68), which emphasizes the Chthonic perspective of the place. Near the sacred glen where these temples were erected, a Palaimon was constructed with a place for offering to the dead. Evidence of the presence of a Chthonic Dionysos is a mosaic that went down on the floor of the middle temple some time after it had been constructed, depicting two baskets and two large snakes wrapped around them (Ibid:68). This underscores the Chthonic disposition of Corinth, and the development of a religious outlook focused on the dead and the underworld. We see this also in the Christ cult, as we shall see a little later.

### **The Chthonic Christ cult of Corinth.**

At the time of Paul, Corinth was a Roman city, temples and places of worship had been destroyed or rebuild to suit Roman culture and ideology. This meant in particular a control of water as an expression of Roman culture and hegemony (DeMaris 2008:45), the public bath was a cornerstone and marker of Roman civilization. But the emphasis on water was already strong in Corinthian worship before Rome sacked the city, in particular to the Demeter/Kore cult which sanctuary was

situated on the fortified heights above the city. From the chapter-section on symposium, we know that bath facilities was made available for the diners, and archaeological evidence has verified a connection between ritual cleansing and dining in the architecture of the dining room themselves, with a small area for bathing along the areas for cooking and reclining. This is important for understanding the development of the Christian cleansing ritual of baptism. Archaeological data «suggest a varied and extensive use of water for cultic purposes. But such water use came to an abrupt end when Rome sacked Corinth.» (Ibid: 49)

We see that the control of water was an important part of Corinthian culture too. DeMaris writes that the Christian use of water in baptism both mirrored and broke with the Roman use of water. What he does not say is that different ritual use of water can well have to do with varying perceptions of water. «If these surviving residents could no longer engage in the sacred water use their ancestors had – as shown above, water facilities at key Greek religious sites had vanished by Roman times – perhaps they gave expression to their religious disposition in another venue.» (Ibid:52). But we do not get an answer on how the remaining Corinthians viewed water. If some of them joined the church Paul writes to, did they still consider water the way they always had, or did they adopt a different view?

If the Corinthians had lost sanctuaries and temples attached to ritual water use, there were others that remained, only dedicated to other gods or imperial power, what prevented the Corinthians from viewing or using water in the same way? Could they not still bathe, sacrifice and serve their gods, even though the Romans had declared the fountain to be dedicated to another god? We see a little of this in chapter 15 (verse 29) of Paul first letter to the Corinthians, referring to baptism on behalf of the dead in such a way that it seems to be a practice particular to Corinth: «Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?» We see in this case a mix of the special Chthonic perspective of the Corinthians with a distinct significance attached to ritual use of water. «Could such an orientation in the church reflect a native Corinthian predilection for sacred water use? If so, the church was providing an outlet for a local Greek religiosity that could no longer come to expression in the sacred landscape that Rome was creating on Greek soil.» (DeMaris 2008:53).

Could this have involved other ritual practices, like the drinking of wine, honouring «dumb idols», and participating at temples where animals were sacrificed to pagan gods? I will continue this discussion in the last chapter of this thesis **A closing discussion**. But I will say for now that there is another rite that displayed a Chthonic perspective in the Christ cult, and that is the dining ritual, later known as the Lord's Supper.

Paul places the communion meal in a mortuary context: «For whenever you eat this bread and

drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes» (*1Cor* 11:26). «Most scholars characterize the church there [Corinth] as largely, if not exclusively, Gentile, so presumably many coming into the church would have brought an underworld orientation with them.» (DeMaris 2008:69, my indentations). The Chthonic perspective of the Corinthians is continued in the Christ cult.

DeMaris (Ibid:70) claims that Paul tailored the message of Christ to his audience: «I resolved to know nothing while I was among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified» (*1Cor* 2:2). But maybe he did so because the early church cared little for Christ's resurrection? Paul writes this in *1Cor* 15:12-3: «But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.».

Jonathan Z. Smith claims this is not particularly Corinthian, pointing to the *Gospel of Mark* and *Q*. «There is good evidence for early martyrological interpretations of Jesus in which his death has soteriological implications without any focus on a resurrection.» (Smith 1990:110). He says that when the archaeological data is examined we see a discrepancy between the presence of a dying and rising Christ in early Christian writings and what iconographical evidence show. Here he leans on G.F. Snyder's survey, saying that the symbols show the Jesus-followers being delivered from hardship (including death) or being at peace despite them. Artistic analogies from 180 to 400 C.E. does not show a sacrificed or self-giving Christ (Ibid:113). The early Christians could eat with the dead, talk to them and ask for assistance. Snyder (quoted in Smith 1990:130) claims that the presence of the dead was made possible through the redeeming act of the wonder-worker Jesus. They were allowed to stay in the extended family of the Christians. This meant that cemeteries was a centre for religious activity, where the family feasted with their dead. Their feast was literally shared with the dead as wine was poured into a depression connected to the tomb (Smith referring to Snyder 1990:132).

This feast was held in a spirit of confidence - the peace that had marked the fellowship before the dead passed away would continue afterwards. If this interpretation is true, than the early Jesus-followers were very different from the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, that shared a meal with their dead by breaking bread amongst themselves and pouring liquid down a pipe connected to the tomb of their departed loved ones. Bottéro (1992:282) claims they did this, not in a feeling of confidence, but in an exorcistic act for fear the dead would be too dissatisfied in the Netherworld they would come back to haunt them. It seems natural to wonder whether the feelings of the early Jesus-followers differed all that much from the Mesopotamians, when the ritual that both engaged in was so similar. For more about the drink-offering to the dead, see chapter **Wine cults around the**

## **Mediterranean.**

In the interpretation of Snyder and Smith, Jesus is a wonderworker and a magician, promising no existence after death that would entail immortality or resurrection. The Christians are happy because they can still have contact with the dead but in an atmosphere of peace without fear. Jesus seems here like a conjurer or exorcist, a middleman between the deceased and his followers. Absent is the rising and dying divinity from the letters of Paul, but absent as well is the gospel of *Q*, which is considered to be the earliest piece of writings on Christ.

What good is Jesus' lesson to live a certain way when people continue spending their time by the graveside? There may be a strong focus on the Chthonic and the underworld in Corinth, but the funerary aspect that the Christians were engaged in, if we are to lend ear to Snyder and Smith, seems to have been rather less flamboyant than the Chthonic mystery-cults on offer around. Gone is a hope for a blissful afterlife, gone is the idea of being reborn. The church Paul speaks about and writes to, seems very different from the Christian gatherings Smith and Snyder draws a picture of.

The Corinthians may share meals with their dead, and being baptized on their behalf, but the community is vibrant and alive, inquisitive and literary. Why would Paul then criticize the Corinthians for thinking they had all the answers, having found a wisdom that made them kings?

Koester (2005) maintains that the Corinthians claimed that they possessed hidden wisdom, and they used sayings of Jesus to justify this claim. Paul chastise them for their feeling of security and sense of having achieved salvation already: «I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart.» (*1Cor.1:19*), «Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings – and that without us! How I wish that you had become kings so that we might be kings with you! (*1Cor.4:8*)

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, which contains no reference to Jesus' death on the cross, revelation through Jesus' words is the primary message of salvation. Those who discover that wisdom is hidden in themselves are being saved by that very knowledge... Those who seek and find that hidden wisdom will become kings and rule over the All» (*Gos. Thom. 2*, quoted in Koester 2005:344)

The wisdom that made the Corinthians feel like kings with an already obtained salvation, reminds me of the hidden knowledge the *Bacchoi* was taught by the beggar priests of Orpheus, they claim in the inscriptions they take with them to their graves that they are of the same heavenly race as the immortals encountered in the Netherworld, and the prizes or rites that waited for the other blessed ones, will be ready for them (Gold lamellae nr.5, and nr. 26 a in Graf and Johnston 2007:13).

The Corinthians have another ritual containing sacred water use that seems to suggest a different practice from Snyder and Smith's description. An excavation site called the «Fountain of the

Lamps» have unearthed a number of inscribed lamps with crosses and displays of stories from the Old Testament (DeMaris 2008: 54). Nymphs were approached by the pagan Corinthians at the bath, and DeMaris asks if the Christians sought to invoke angels to exorcise the daimons thought to live there, yet he cannot rule out that the adherents of the Christ cult were invoking both Nymphs and angels (Ibid:54). We see here a nocturnal (why else would you light lamps) ritual connected to a special use of sacred water. The ritual is for the living and a pictorial usage of the cross is present. The use of lamps to light up a dark place of worship brings to mind the Demeter/Kore cult where the initiates call for Iacchos, the torchbearer to come and lead the way into the light. Fumbling through darkness, guided to the light by a *mystagog* seems to have been a part of the Dionysos cults as well (Seaford (Euripides) 1996:201). I will return to the experiences of the initiates in my chapter on **Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology**. Whether this water ritual contained connotations of the Christian baptism is not possible to decipher. It shows in any case that rituals involving the use of sacred water had survived the changes imposed on the Corinthians by the Romans, and it shows an interesting mix of Christian and Greek religious symbols.

## Wine cults around the Mediterranean

Dining rituals is both a unifying and discriminating activity. Dining together creates solidarity among the diners and therefore eases any social tension that exists between them. It does so in part because the meal distinguishes those at table from those not at table; those invited to the table constitute a group. (DeMaris 2008: 31)

### Evidence of ritual meals and wine in Middle Eastern cults.

Wine can restore your health, it brings life and salvation, "the association of wine and blood, with wine being described as the blood of the vine, is ancient and widespread" (Burkert 1985 [1977]: 164).

In the following Hittite ritual, we see something that looks like a forerunner of the breaking of bread in the Eucharist, the drink offering in the Greek cults and the ritual use of lamps as seen in the Christ cult in Corinth, and in the Chthonic Demeter/Kore cult, (see the chapters **Corinth** and **Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology**). There is first a sham fight that seems to mimic the harvest itself, where the bronze weapons (harvest-utensils) win over the reed weapons (the crop). Collins writes this:

...following cult-inventory text: They provide cups, while the *hazzara*-women entertain the god. They divide the young men in half and name them. They call one half the «men of Ḫatti» and they call the other half the «men of Maša.» The «men of Ḫatti» have weapons of bronze while the «men of Maša» have weapons of reed. And they do battle. The «men of Ḫatti» prevail over them and take a prisoner and give (ḫink-) him to the god. They pick up the god and carry him into the temple and set (him) in the altar. They break one loaf of a handful, libate beer and set down the lamps. (Collins 1995:83)

Looking back to the part on symposium in the chapter on **The wine cult of Christ** we see that bringing the god to the meal is also repeated much later in the Greco-Roman banquet clubs, and in the Christ cult as well, where Jesus is invoked to participate in the Eucharist, since he is commemorated in the ritualistic action of the meal, but also in what the banqueters are eating and drinking. Smith (2003) calls bread the *deipnon*- «supper» itself. Meat being a scarcity, bread is the main ingredient of the Greco-Roman diet along with vegetables and fish (Craik 1995). In the Hittite religion we find that bread is a natural part of the libation rituals: «Often libations are poured in conjunction with the breaking of bread.» (Collins 1995: 85). The libations take on another meaning, familiar to us through the Bacchic and Christian rituals, as the participants end the ritual in a feast: «The final act in any sacrificial celebration is the drinking ceremony, in which the participants «drink the god.» «The god in question is always the one(s) to whom the ritual is directed.» (Ibid:85).

However, Collins admits that there is debate about the meaning of the phrase «to drink the god», as it is in regards to the Bacchic, or indeed, Christian «drinking the god»



The meaning of the phrase «to drink the god» continues to be in dispute. The problem centers on the use of an accusative rather than a dative for the object, forcing the translation «drink the god» rather than the more easily explained «drink to the god, » or, as has been proposed, «give to the god to drink,» with the verb taking on an uncharacteristic causative sense. Melchert has summarized previous discussion in his article on the subject, in which he reasserts the meaning «drink to (the honor of) the god.» Güterbock disagrees with all these proposals and asserts instead that the god being «drunk» is the liquid contained in the cup. For the sake of caution, the phrase is translated literally in this essay.» (Ibid: 86).

If we agree with Güterbock which Collins refers to, then we see an equation with «the god in the drink» of Christianity and the cults of Dionysos. As we have seen from the different symposia that Dennis Smith and MacMullen writes about, the presence of the god is arranged by carrying a statue or some iconographic representation of the god into the banquet hall and place him among the participants, so when you drink, you not only drink to his or her honour, the god is participating in the feast with you, bestowing blessing on the feast. «More than simply a communion with the god, the ritual feast was a chance to sway a god or goddess to benevolence.» (Collins 1995:90) They invited the gods to share their meal in the hope to earn favours from them.

Collins refers to something that suggests the necessity of a cleansing ritual before joining the sacrificial celebration, like the lustrations before the Eleusinian (Mylonas 1969) and Bacchic (Zuntz 1964) cult-rituals, and the baptismal washing prior to the Eucharist (Wagner 1967 and Spinks 2006): «Another passage states that the «men of the courtyard» (ḫilammīēš), whichever of them have bathed, may eat the meat and drink the cup of wine that has been provided.» (Collins 1995: 89). To share a feast with the gods can be cleansing as well: «Who(ever) is hungry, who(ever) is thirsty (among) the gods, come, eat and drink, and join with me. From the house and city may you cleanse the evil impurity, bloodshed, perjury, sin, and curse.» (Ibid:91). But the next passage shows that the gods were indeed dependent on man to worship them, and through that provide for them: «[If] you destroy humankind, they will no longer [worship] the gods. No one will offer [bread] or libations to you any longer...» (Ibid: 92)

In connection with the Hittite, Burkert (1985) writes that even though Dionysos is an ancient god on Greek soil and his worship can be traced back to the fifteenth century B.C.E. (p.162), a non-Greek origin for the names associated with Dionysos is very probable indeed (p.163), he refers to the *thyrsos*, the sacred wand, and says that it may be associated with the Late Hittite word *tuwarsa*, meaning vine: «reference has frequently been made to the Vegetation God on the Late Hittite rock relief from Ivriz, who holds ears of corn and bunches of grapes» (Burkert 1985:163). It is worth noting that the power of Moses' rod mimicks the bacchants' thyrsos in the *Bacchae* when it brings forth water when struck against the rock (*Numbers* 20:11cf. Euripides 1996: v.706-7). In *Bacchae* the thyrsos is an instrument of the god's power, as it is, no doubt, in the story about the thirsting people of Moses.

Earlier in the chapter on Corinth we saw that the early Christians shared a eucharist-like meal with their dead fellow Christians. The atmosphere was that of peace according to Smith (1990), and yet this ritual meal was repeated, stating a strong funerary focus in the early Christ cults. In Corinth, Paul's letters tell us that baptism was performed on behalf of the dead (*1Cor.15:29*), and repeating the ritual meal of the Lord's supper the Corinthians were proclaiming the death of Christ (*1Cor.11:26*). This concern for the realm of the dead to the degree that they tried to interact with them directly is not new. Jean Bottéro (1992) writes about a Mesopotamian ritual where the living share meals with their dead family. The Netherworld is thought as a gloomy, unfertile land where the needs of the dead have to be met by the people in the living realm. Like the god's rely on the humans to provide the things needed for consumption, the dead must be provided for with food too. Bottéro writes about a pipe inserted into the tomb through which the living could pour liquids down to the dead, to share the feast (p.281), called *kasâpu* which means to break or divide food (Ibid:282). The meal strengthened the bond between the group of the living attending the meal, but included the ones who had passed away as well. However, the meal was an exorcistic ritual, the dead, displeased in their gloomy abode, could haunt and torment the living (Ibid:282).

The concern for the dead was two-sided, the abundance of the earth was shared with the departed in a honouring libation which familymembers both living and dead was invited to share, but it was also a means to sooth the thirsty and unhappy dead. Smith (1990) does not hint that this might have been the reason why the early Christians poured wine into the tombs of their dearly departed. The atmosphere was not that of fear but in assurance that the dead was at a place of peace where they could communicate and lend help to the living. In Smith's claim the early Jesus-followers went on sharing the Eucharist with each other even if some of the community had died, but the dead do not need to partake of the meal. However, Smith does not take the Hittite feast of *kasâpu* into consideration, we do not know what he might have concluded if he had done so.

As we have seen, the Corinthians was very concerned with the Chthonic realm and the departed, but unlike the early Christians Smith talks about, the dead are cared for to ensure them a part of the fellowship of Christ. The Corinthians practice a baptism by proxy, where the living are baptized on behalf of the dead. For more about this see chapter **Corinth**.

## **Wine in Judaism and ancient Israelite religion**

Peter-Ben Smit writes that wine equated with blood was a strong symbol in Israelite religion:

wine appears in the contexts of covenants, as part of sacrifices, as a symbol for blood [most notably as «blood of the grape» with obvious associations], and, pursuing the latter theme further: as an intoxicating and hence possibly destructive liquid, and (thus as (an indication of) «idolatry.» Its consumption is in some instances forbidden. (Smit 2008:105-6, (my indentation containing Smit's note 482, p.106))

In *Sirach* 50:15 (*Apocrypha*) the blood of the grape is poured out on the ground as a libation to God: «He stretched out his hand to the cup, and poured of the blood of the grape, he poured out at the foot of the altar a sweetsmelling savour unto the most high King of all.» (King James version (*Apocrypha*), Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library). The high King shall not only be given blood from sacrificed animals, but blood from the vegetable world. *Genesis* 49:11, speaks of the great power of Judah, enjoying great favour with God: «Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes.» The wine in this story signify great wealth and abundance for Judah.

In *Deuteronomy* 32:14, wine is indeed a symbol of opulence and abundance. Jacob and his people shall enjoy among other things: «Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock, With fat of lambs; And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, With the choicest wheat; And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.» If we see *Sirach* 50:15 (*Apocrypha*) in connection with *Deuteronomy* 12:16: Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water», we see that both vegetable and animal blood is given in sacrifice, poured on the ground, but unlike the animal blood, man can partake of the drink-offering, enjoying the libation given to Yahweh. Smit goes on to describe the significance of wine as a symbolic drink in the literature of ancient Israelite religion and the Greco-Roman world.

In the HB/OT, the ANE and the Greco-Roman world wine is a symbolic drink whose significance transcends its mere identity as a potable liquid. Even when concentrating on the spectrum of meanings within the HB/OT and in early Jewish traditions, wine and the grapevine appear in a number of contexts and with a number of meanings. Abundance of wine signifies the divine favor and is as such as a symbol for the abundance in the utopian promised land, its absence indicates privation in general, its (returned) presence symbolizes the restoration of Israel and, for example in that context, joy. In view of the latter connotation, wine is the main festive drink and a generous host (e.g. God, wisdom) should serve plenty of it.» (Smit 2008:104-5)

### **Wine as a symbol for eschatological abundance.**

Wine can be a metaphor for opulence in the hereafter. In Mark 14:25, Jesus says he will abstain from drinking wine till he can enjoy the fruit of the vine in the kingdom of God. This wine will be a drink of completion and celebration, unlike the cup (14:36) he asks God to take away from him, a cup of bitter suffering and death. Wine is a sacrifice reserved for God, but man may be fortunate to partake of it, and he may do so in the hereafter as well as on earth. There is a paradisiac vineyard in the mother religion of Judaism too, fulfilling the eschatological hopes. *Deuteronomy* 33:28 tells of such future hopes: «Then Israel shall dwell in safety, The fountain of Jacob alone, In a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew.»

In *2 Kings* 18:32, we find eschatological expectations as well: «until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of

olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die.»

In *Genesis* 27:28, we have wine as a symbol of abundance enjoyed on earth, through the grace of Yahweh: «Therefore may God give you Of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine.», as it is in *Ecclesiastes* 10:19, where it is a clear sign of wealth, since it should be part of any feast: «A feast is made for laughter, And wine makes merry; But money answers everything.»

The absence of wine is indeed a sad business and a token of poverty and misery as we hear in *Isaiah* 24:11: «There is a cry for wine in the streets, All joy is darkened, The mirth of the land is gone.»

In view of the description of Jesus' last meal as a Passover meal it should at least be noted that as part of the wider motif field of wine as an eschatological symbol the fourth cup of the Passover meal is in rabbinic times associated with eschatological expectations. Wine together with its dregs occurs in judgment scenes as well, which are, however eschatological, not relevant for the interpretation of the tradition contained in Mk. 14:25 (cf. Ps. 75:9). (Smit 2008:106-7)

We could of course site *Psalms* 75:8 where the dregs of the wine occurs in judgement as an instrument of punishment: «For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain and drink down.»

It echoes the foreboding feeling from the *Book of Revelations* 14:20 where the blood from the wine-press of God's wrath will wash over the land: «up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.»

Smit (2008) follows: «Similar meanings could be associated with the wine press as well, though neither aspect is directly relevant for the interpretation of Mk. 14:25. In daily life wine also had the role of a staple food (together with oil and bread, cf. Ps. 104:15). All these features and associations renders wine a highly ambivalent drink.» (Ibid: 106-7) We see its ambivalence in *Proverbs* 4:17: «For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.» In *Mark* 14:36, the cup Jesus wants God to take away, is a bitter drink, entailing a violent death. Wine is abundance, hope, and cruel pain and death. In Greece and Sicily (Diodorus Siculus, 3.62.7) the wine-god Dionysos undergoes mutilation and death to produce wine for the titans, every vintage season the farmers mimic his death as they harvest the grapes and crush them, even boil the liquid produced like the horned child was boiled by his assailants. The introduction of the culture of wine is indeed a violent and deadly one, as the story of king Kadmos testifies, see chapter on **Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology**, below. The cup can bring salvation from suffering, or it can represent ill fate.

When we take a closer look at wine as a symbol for abundance and an eschatological hope for the hereafter it is worth looking at the following passages from *Numbers* 6:2-4, where wine is equated with God. To draw a line of distinction between Yahweh and his followers the products of, or associated with the vine and its fruit shall be reserved for God and not enjoyed by the people about to take the vow of a Nazarite. Wine is a sacrifice to Yahweh, but also what sets him apart from his worshippers. In *Num.* 6:2, Yahweh is speaking to Moses telling him how to separate a man or woman from the Lord: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, 'he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.»

### **Dionysos in Palestine**

In the chapter **The wine cult of Christ**, I wrote about a feast where Dionysos is attending as a human guest, but reveals himself as a god as he turns the liquid served (what an ox would drink) into wine. «Whence my friend, do you have this purple water? Whence have you found such sweet blood?» (Achilles Tatius, 2.2.1), asks the host of the feast Dionysos, which explains that it is the «water of summer, blood of the grape cluster». M. Smith (1996) writes that Achilles Tatius refers to the festival of Dionysos at the beginning of the vintage in Sidon, which was «about the same time of year as Sukkoth, the Israelite vintage festival.» (227). The text have been dated to the second century C.E, but is probably of a much earlier date which makes it important for the question of the presence of Dionysos in Palestine about the beginning of Christianity. Its similarity with the wine-miracle of Cana in *John* 2:1-11 is striking, but it provides a substantiating clue to the claim that John writes polemically against the wine-god of the pagans in 15:1, where Jesus presents himself as the true vine in contradiction to the false wine of the unruly Dionysos. The text from Tatius shows that in the neighbouring town of Galilee, at Sidon, a Greek wine-god was being celebrated.

*Mark* writes that Jesus visited Sidon (7:31), and we know that a mosaic carpet depicting Dionysos and themes from his life decorated a mansion in Sepphoris in the third century C.E. (Meyers 2006:181).

Smith (1996:231) writes that Plutarch identifies Yahweh with Dionysos in *Quaestiones Convivales* 4,5,end and 6, but that this identification was started by the Jews themselves. He refers to coins depicting a deity with a satyr's mask, saying: «a deity who appears on the coins of a state is probably one whom the state worships.» (Ibid: 232). Both M. Smith (1996) and P. Smit (2008)

mentions coins from the Jewish revolts in 66-73 and 132-35, depicting grape clusters, vine leaves, chalice, and amphorae.

Smith maintains that the appropriation of Dionysos' attributes with Yahweh did not mean that the worship of Dionysos ended. As I will show in my concluding discussion, this is repeated in the lasting worship of Dionysos by people who had taken up worshipping Christ. We see it represented in the continued iconographical usage of attributes associated with Bacchic and Christian cults.

The *Apocrypha* texts of the *Maccabees* tell about Jews being forced to worship Bacchus, where the symbol of the ivy leaf is prominent. In 2 *Macc.* 6:7 we read about a procession during the festival of Dionysos: «And in the day of the king's birth every month they were brought by bitter constraint to eat of the sacrifices; and when the fast of Bacchus was kept, the Jews were compelled to go in procession to Bacchus, carrying ivy.» In the next passage this symbol of Dionysiac abundance is branded into the skin: 3.*Macc.*2:29: «those who are registered are also to be branded on their bodies by fire with the ivy-leaf symbol of Dionysus, and they shall also be reduced to their former limited status.»

We see here that not only was there a wine god in Palestine, Yahweh was one. Dionysos was another, gathering followers from Palestine and making a mark on the religious landscape of the Israelites. So much so that Yahweh starts to appropriate some of the attributes associated with Dionysos and his cult, not forgetting his key symbol, the wine.

Wine is given in libation to him, but the red blood of the grape is also a sign of something that belongs to him. We hear echoing the story of Moses' exodus from Egypt, when the people of God is being distinguished from the non-believers by the red-coloured blood painted on the doorposts of the houses. *Exodus* 12:13 says: «Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.»

The colour red is a powerful symbol of holiness and divinity. We see it repeated on the striking walls of the Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii, with a pictorial representation of what is generally interpreted as a Bacchic initiation ceremony. The walls are decorated with paintings, splendidly preserved, but the colour itself on the panels may have been of a particular importance as it is a blood-red crimson. It is of course the colour of the blood of the grapes.

Indeed the author Günther Zuntz (1964) interprets the key-story of the fresco to be the epiphany of Dionysos through love and wine. The central panel depicts the god, lazily laid-back in the embrace of his beloved Ariadne, sitting up-right, on a throne-like seat. Around are satyrs and human women. The satyrs hold a drinking-bowl, gazing with great amazement and anticipation into it,

expecting to see wine filling the empty chalice (Zuntz 1964:186), due to the presence of the wine-god to their right. Revelation of the youthful god in another form happens as well, to the right of the loving couple of Dionysos and Ariadne, a woman uncovers a growing phallus in a *liknon*. Zuntz claims that certain changes have been made to the originally Greek murals to accomodate Roman tastes, so the woman appears to be covering the phallus (Ibid:197) instead of revealing this symbol from Bacchic cults. The cult of Bacchus and the role of wine in his cult is something I will return to in the chapter **Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology**.

## Christian and Bacchic rituals and theology.

### Rituals of lustration.

#### **Baptism, Created ex nihilo, not the main and only ceremony of initiation, or not an initiation ceremony at all?**

«Ideas of purity among the Jews, however, were similar to those in their surrounding cultures. First century Judaism, moreover, saw considerable influence from Hellenism.» (Ferguson 2009:60)

Ferguson writes as well that Greek and Roman writers before the mid-second century often did not distinguish Christians from Jews (Ibid:79), does this mean that they saw no ritual that separated the Christian from the Jews? Were the rituals of Christianity familiar with Jewish rituals of cleansing, or the many cultic lustration from the Greco-Roman world, to see something peculiar in the immersion of the Jesus-followers? Maybe they were not all that acquainted with the rituals of the early church, maybe some was held secret, invisible even in the scriptures that have survived down the ages in one piece, but hinted at in other fragmentary texts, as Smith (1973) claims.

The early adherents of the Christ cult participated in other cultic meals at the temples of the Greek and Roman deities, and we know that non-believers could walk in on the prophesying Corinthians (*1 Cor.14:23*). Could this include the cult-meal of the Lord's Supper? Maxwell Johnson (2007) investigates if the Eucharist was an initiatory meal in the cult of Christ, or if there was preparatory actions needed to participate in the table-companionship of the early church. He finds none, but explains the reason why Jesus was called a glutton and a drunkard with the lack of restriction to join the table, since the gospels record no

specific rites of entrance or preparation for this meal sharing with Jesus. Rather, to use our own now traditional sacramental language, the meal itself was not the *culmination* of initiation but appears rather as the *inception*, the very *beginnings* of initiation, the «sacrament» of initiation, if you will, *the* rite of incorporation into Christ. Nothing, not even baptism and certainly nothing like confirmation, was required as preparatory steps.»(Johnson 2007:5-6)

Anyone could join. Jesus, being a friend of sinners, ate with many deemed «impure», but the banquet he shares with his disciples before his arrest is described as a private ceremony. Jesus is to drink of a cup he would rather not (Mark 14:36), and the feast is marked by a morbid transformation of the Jewish dietary laws where the blood of Christ is not only a new covenant in replacement of Moses', but a covenant the disciples are invited to drink from. I will return to the blood covenant below.

Ferguson thinks that the origin of Christian baptism might owe more to the Jewish scriptures and tradition of the Misnah and Mikva'oth, or Mikve - ritual bath, than to the lustration ceremonies of



the pagan cults, because the submerging into water in pagan rituals were part of an initiation, not the initiation itself. But the Mikve is ritual washing that needs to be repeated, it does not count as part of an initiation itself.

Ritual washings, immersions, or ritual baths were a common practice among the Essene community at Qumran near the Dead Sea. It has been deemed likely that John the Baptist might have belonged to this community, given the accounts of John the Baptist in the Gospels of his ascetic lifestyle, distinct wardrobe, his special diet, and immersing proselytes (Johnson 2007).

Ferguson looks at Proselyte baptism as well, to test his thesis that baptism might stem from a Jewish tradition, but: «[t]he date for the origin of proselyte baptism cannot be determined.» (76-77). «According to rabbinic literature there were three requirements for a Gentile converting to Judaism: circumcision, immersion (tebilah), and sacrifice.» (Ibid:77).

Since the sacrifice was pre-70 in practice, there is a presumption that the immersion was too. When this washing was formalized as part of the process of becoming a proselyte, however, cannot be determined; when its meaning was extended beyond a ceremonial purification is apparently a yet later development.» (Ibid:77)

Proselyte baptism did not differ from other washings in Judaism, it was a full immersion of the body and most importantly it was self-administered. Another difference that Ferguson points to, is that proselyte baptism was for Gentiles, but Christians baptized Jews as well as Gentiles. But he does not see that baptism can owe its origin from the neighbouring cults:

Those who have paralleled the use of water in the Mystery cults with Christian baptism have either blended the preliminary baths with the effects of the initiation itself, misinterpreted texts, or relied on late Christian writers who Christianized the significance of the ceremonies. There was a significant difference in the use of water for purification in the Mysteries and its use in Christianity. The washing in the Mysteries was a preliminary preparation for the initiation; in Christianity it was the center of initiation into the Church. (Ibid:29)

Is the difference really so great as Ferguson claims? Was baptism really the beginning and end of the Christian initiation ceremony? Do we not see a long list of preliminary actions that lead up to baptism, the laying on of hands and finally the sharing of the Lord's Supper? Ferguson writes about initiation ceremonies among the Gnostics, mentioning as seen before the Sethians and rituals from the Nag Hammadi Library, where the baptismal water had been transformed into water from wine (under chapter on **the wine cult of Christ**). This ceremony, that is taken from the translation by Violet MacDermot, also contains a baptism by fire, where Jesus uses incense, «caused the disciples to be clothed in linen» and anoints them with perfume, before it ends with the disciples being crowned with myrtle, singing hymns while joining hands in a circle (Ibid:297-298).

Ferguson finds this Gnostic ceremony very different from Christian baptism, he even says it

«shows few points of contact», so much so, that it may even suggest a non-Christian origin «perhaps in a Jewish baptizing sect, whose practice was then placed in a Gnostic framework» (p.299).

Yet these practices does not seem to vary that much from the Gnostic Valentinian initiation, which, according to Ferguson: «did not differ significantly from that in the great church, and the Valentinian texts [from the second century C.E.] provide the earliest evidence for some of the practices.» (p.289, (my brackets)).

A synthesis of Valentinian events gives this sequence of rituals: a period of instructions, fasting, prayers and confession, undressing; immersion with invocation of the Holy Trinity, a profession of faith; anointing of oil; imposition of hands; a peace greeting and kiss; and a procession of lamps (Ibid:289). What we see here is an array of rites that constitutes the initiation ritual, baptism is one, but not the only one.

Ferguson lists many mystery cults in which rituals of initiation contained a ceremony of purification, he even suggest that the «Orphics were characterized by purifications, which removed more than ceremonial impediments» and here he refers to the work ascribed to Orpheus, *Argonautica*, probably from the late fifth century: «You are not able to approach your homeland before you have washed away [ἐκνίφησθε] your stain in the sacred purification [καθαρμοῖς] thanks to Orpheus» (1230-33, Ibid:29).

The *Argonautica* does indeed seem to refer to a number of Orphic rites and myths, and I will take a brief closer look at the text in the formidable Norwegian translation by Arve Omtvedt Berntzen: «Det er min oppfatning at dere ikke kan komme nær deres fedreland før dere, ved kapp Maleas kyst, har vasket av dere urenheterne gjennom guddommelig renselse ved hjelp av Orfeus' kyndighet, mens dere forholder dere tause av frykt for konsekvensene av illgjerningene som enda ikke er sonet for.» (2009:223).

The text speaks of a divine purification that through the skill of Orpheus can wash away stains of misdeeds not yet atoned. What kind of skill did Orpheus have in divine purification that made atonement unnecessary? Earlier in the text, Orpheus says that he has revealed the awesome power of the gods Bacchus and Apollo, which is a purification for mortal men and powerful mysteries for the initiates (Orpheus's *Argonautica* 10-15, in Berntzen 2009, 174). Orpheus teaches the purifying katharsis that is a powerful help to humankind (line 30-40, Ibid:175), katharsis which is an instrument of the god's «awesome powers», a secret lesson given to mankind in the mysteries.

The gifts of Orpheus is listed in lines 30-40, where purification is mentioned. One of these gifts is the art of divination and soothsaying, gifts that also the god Dionysos could bestow, no doubt to Orpheus, since he could pass it on. The art of reading signs in the movements of the stars is

mentioned directly before the passage about the purifying katharsis, this brings to mind Orphic doctrines of metempsychosis, where the soul was thought to travel through the spheres of the cosmos before escaping the cycle of reincarnation (Burkert 1985: 300). Johnston (in Fritz and Johnston 2007:129) writes that one of the theories explaining the meaning behind the phrase «A kid I fell into milk», from tablet five (Ibid:13) has been that it was a reference to the Milky Way and that the «children of the starry Sky», of line 6, tablet 2 (Ibid:7) expected to find their postmortem bliss in the sky. Johnston finds this unlikely, given that the tablets all suggest that the location for the initiates paradise was subterranean. (Ibid:129).

Mylonas (1969) writes that on the first day, *Aghyrmos*, of the Greater Mysteries in the Demeter/Kore cult of Eleusis lustration rituals was performed (p.248). A *Hydronas* sprayed the people seeking initiation with water or they poured it over themselves. On the second day, *Elasis*, more rituals of purification were being performed, the initiates washed themselves and the piglet they would sacrifice in the sea. Sacrificing piglets was also an action of lustration as the blood of the pig was thought to be purifying as well: «The blood of the pig was considered a very potent agent of purification with the power to absorb the impure spirit inhabiting human beings.» (Ibid:249) The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (Norwegian translation by Frost 2006:170) says that the rites of Demeter should be celebrated with a pure mind, in this connection the pig's blood would be an instrument of lustration - as if the blood of the sacrificial animal transports the guilt of the one offering the animal, like we see in *Leviticus* 16:18-20, the blood of the sacrificial animal is purifying, ridding the people of guilt in the eyes of Yahweh. The doctrine of the church sees the blood of the sacrificed lamb of God, Jesus, who willingly sacrificed himself, as delivering the world, believers and non-believers, from sin: *John* 1:29: «Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.».

Ferguson writes about a relief from the Museum at Eleusis from the fourth century B.C.E, depicting a lustration ritual from the Demeter/Kore cult that seems like a forerunner to the Christian baptism (Ferguson 2009:30). A very tall Persephone pours water from a shell over the head of a small nude boy. This image is repeated in Christian art where the baptizer holds a hand over the head of the one being baptized, who stand nude and much shorter than the baptizer. (Ibid: Front cover and p.30)

The purification was also achieved through fasting on the sixth day (Telete) of the Greater Mysteries, where the initiates, whom Burkert calls the *Mystai* (Burkert 1985:286), would abstain from certain kinds of food if the fasting was only partial (Mylonas 1969:258), or abstain from eating the days of the Mysteries. The Hymn brings especially to mind wine that Demeter refrained from drinking and the pomegranate that Persephone unhappily ate from in the Netherworld, thus sealing

her own doom by binding herself to Hades through the food passing her lips. We see a warning from drinking the wrong thing in Hades in the Bacchic gold lamellae too, where the initiate is told not to drink of a spring by a white cypress tree, she should ask to drink from the Lake of Memory instead (Gold lamellae nr. 1 in Graf and Johnston 2007:5). I will look at other rituals of lustration below, but I will now return to the baptism of the Christ cult and theories around its origin.

Spinks sees the Proselyte bathing, the Qumran purification rituals, and Old Testament foundations as antecedents of John's baptism and that: «Jesus, it would seem, was originally allied with the baptist, but later broke from him, and the Jesus movement became distinct with its own rite of baptism.» (Spinks 2006:5)

In the formidable book *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries*, Wagner (1967) takes into due consideration Pauline mysticism with a comparison of the neighbouring mystic cults of the age, but he fails to consider Dionysiac cults with, or without Orphic interpretation. Given the time Wagner worked at his book, this may not be surprising, since the study on Orphism, or things Orphic was in its infancy, some would even suggest that this is the case still today, 40 years later. However, there was ample reason to take the Bacchic rites into consideration. Are we then correct in assuming that the reason stems not from the lack of sensible work on Orphism, but from the difficult subject of possibly equating and comparing the orgiastic Bacchic cult with the «pure» cult of Christianity, deemed so unique in its Hellenistic surroundings and free from contamination?

Wagner claims that he does not have any «apologetic interests (Wagner 1967), still the omittance of the Bacchic cult from his survey smacks of the enthusiasm of the «religio-historical» school, and an undue distaste for what he calls the «blind reaction» of scholars who ventures to consider the implication of a Hellenistic mystic cult origin of the Christ-cult, and not an origin in Israelitic religion alone. Scholars opposed to this claim fails accordingly to see the development of the Jewish religions during the same era. Biale (2007) argues against seeing Judaism as the forerunner or origin of Christianity, they «were really *identical* twins: one embryo that later split into two. Rather than the «elder» giving rise to the «younger,» the two developed side-by-side in the wake of the temple's destruction and the Christianization of the Roman Empire.» (p.45). The ancient Israelite religion is the mother of these siblings that developed into such different offspring in the Hellenistic era. Liebes (1993) argues for the same and shows old links to the Medieval mysticism of Kabbalah to Jewish messianism developing in Hellenistic times.

Wagner investigates and argues against a lot of different authors that have proposed a Hellenistic mystery-origin for *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, especially the passage of *Rom.* 6:1-11, where Paul

writes that through baptism the initiate will share in the fate of Jesus, namely death and resurrection, such as some have interpreted was the promise the initiates of Bacchus and Demeter believed in.

What does Rom. 6:1-11 actually say: «What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.» We see here that Paul wants the Romans to understand that they who were baptized have gone through a ritual that meant they had been buried with Christ, rendering them dead to sin, the life they will henceforth live will be to God.

Wagner (1967) writes that Bultman argues that the letter of Paul was read by a community who lived in a Hellenistic milieu where there were several mystery cults offering rites and an eschatological myth to go with them, that told the ones that underwent the rituals they were mimicking the life, death, and rise to life again of the deities, whose mysteries they were initiated into. They therefore understood the initiation ritual Paul described in analogy to the initiation rituals already offered by the mystery cults. Wagner cannot agree with Bultman, because Bultman uses the deities Attis, Adonis and Osiris as examples. What if Bultman had proposed the mystery cults of Demeter and Dionysos? I will return to this below.

Wagner do not agree with the theory of what the mystery cults offered their *mystai*: «While any sort of ethical outlook has been wrongly denied to the mystery religions, the fact remains that the *mystes*' initiation was not regarded as a death to sin and a becoming alive again to a new moral life.» (Ibid:12). We cannot say this is the case of the Pythagoreans and the Orphics (Euripides refers to vegetarians whose master is Orpheus, *Hippolytes* 952-4: «the chase one, untouched by evil», cf. Burkert 1985:297) who preached a life of purity and ascetism. Some Pythagoreans took this to the extreme with many rules to obey, even to the method of breathing. As inhaling too hard could mean endangering souls in the air (Burkert 1985:303). If the *mystai* was not completely «dead to sin», the cults clearly offered atonement of sin (blame), we remember the rites of purification mentioned in

Plato *Republic* 364b-365a, and an ascetic way of life after initiation was implied.

When it comes to the cult of Demeter, Burkert (Ibid:301) refers to the Laws of Triptolomeos in Eleusis ordering the initiates to honour parents, glorify gods with fruits, and not to harm animals, yet this did not mean vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is not entailed in a promise of no cruelty to animals while the animals are alive, still it points to a different set of behaviour.

All the similarities we have cited and the ones we will shortly investigate, will not change Wagner's conception of the mysteries and the mystery Christ brought to his followers, and the mystery Paul speaks of: «Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.» (*1Cor.* 15:51). The language of Paul is another indication that he was strongly influenced by the mystery cult environment that the early churches he wrote to found themselves, as claimed by Reitzenstein, but strongly rejected by Wagner (1967:12).

For Wagner the difference between the message of Christ and the mystery cult is theology. And this difference, between the theology of Paul and the initiation rituals that the mystery cults offered, is for Wagner so strong and overpowering it erases any similarity. The mysteries only signify action - rituals alone, not the soteriological faith that Paul speaks of (Ibid:16). Can we really claim that the main difference lies in faith? How can we measure the religiosity of the followers of mystery cults? This argument has been offered before: It was a coincidence, due to family pressures, that the Corinthians would participate in other cultic feast where the meat eaten had been sacrificed to pagan deities. It did not necessarily mean allegiance to other cults as well (DeMaris 2008:31), because rituals alone would not effect their strong faith in the Lord. Paul says that the idols are nothing, faith surpasses everything, even rituals (*1Cor.*10:19). Yet he changes his mind a little later in *1Cor.*10:18, where he realises that eating at the Jewish sacrifice creates a bond between the ones eating of the sacrificial animal and God.

Wagner quotes Lake (Ibid:17) who says that faith was certainly a precondition for baptism and salvation even though baptism works sacramentally and magically. Faith was in all probability a precondition in the mysteries too. Many of the ritual acts the initiates had to go through certainly calls for a resolute conviction, like the rituals from Eleusis where the *mystes* underwent something that resembles a baptism by fire. Burkert (1985:286) writes that the *mystes* was blindfolded with a veil wrapped around her head, seated on a ram fleece when a torch was brought up close to her from beneath, all in complete silence. The nocturnal processions where Iacchos is evoked in rhythmic shouts must also have had an aspect of dread before the person enacting the role of Iacchos brings

torches to light up the darkness. And let us not forget the snakepit from the festival of Thesmophoria dedicated to Demeter. Piglets are again sacrificed, but their remains are thrown into a chasm, where they are left to decay. Women called the Bailers have to descend into the pit that is rumoured to be full of snakes and bring up the remains that are to be used as a fertilizing component (Burkert 1985:242-3). Burkert (1987) writes about an initiation frieze depicted on a relief from the Demeter/Kore cult where a snake coils itself from the *kiste* Demeter is sitting on to her lap, where a *mystes* is seen approaching to touch the snake's head without fear - «having transcended human anxiety, moving free and relaxed in the divine sphere.» (94). Is this not a description of faith?

But faith is not a constant matter, it may constitute different feelings. The motivation for the *mystai* of the mystery cults is described (Wilson quoted in Ibid:42) as a hope to escape a terrible fate after death (Plato: *Republic* 365a), not a fervent wish to be delivered from a sinful life, as the Christian hoped as they went through the sacrament of baptism.

I asked earlier if Wagner would have been more willing to agree with Bultman had he considered Dionysos as a dying and rising deity the *mystai* sought to emulate in the mystery rituals, but for Wagner, Dionysos does not go through a resurrection as he is reborn and even if he did, the Bacchoi sought unison with him and his divinity through ecstasy, not to be reborn:

Dionysus is possibly to be counted among the «dying and rising» gods though in his case we can only speak of a «resurrection» in the most symbolical sense of the term. In Dionysus «the Greek explains not so much the succession of death to life as their identity». His votaries certainly gave vent to their hopes of immortality in their worship, but they based those hopes not on a ritual and of death and rebirth, a re-experiencing of the god's fortune, but rather on their participation in the festival and, above all, on their assimilation into the godhead and their experience of deification in the moment of ecstasy. (Ibid:67, quoting Nilsson).

This is contradicted by the belief the gold tablets tell us about. Here the Bacchoi have a sincere hope for the afterlife, something that resembles the hope for Christian salvation, salvation from suffering God's punishment awaiting in hell for the ones who failed to accept Christ (*Mark* 3:29 speaks of those who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost). The hopes, Wagner finds lacking, concerning the afterlife, immortality (Now you have died and now you have come into being») and a godlike nature («my race is heavenly»), is found though in the gold lamellae (nr. 26 a,b, and nr. 2 in Fritz and Johnston 2007:37,7) of the buried Bacchoi.

Wagner sees the resurrection of Dionysos as symbolical at best (1967:67). This is probably because he does not consider that Dionysos died as his heart kept on beating after he was slayed by the titans, and till Zeus arranged for him to be conceived and born again. But to be torn apart and cooked could certainly be equated with a kind of death as it enabled him to travel into Hades to retrieve his mother Semele to restore her to her rightful place among the gods at Olympos, sharing his immortality with her and changing her name to Thyone as Diodorus Siculus writes (4.25.4,

cf. Kerényi:2008:259). Orpheus repeats this when he tries to retrieve his dear Eurydice from the realm of death. (Diodorus Siculus 4.25).

As *Liknites* – «he in the *liknon*», Dionysos was awakened by the Dionysian women in a cave on Mount Parnassos, according to Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 365a-365c. Plutarch mentions: τὰ τοῦ Διονίσου λείψανα – the relics of Dionysos, remains as of a corpse that needs waking up. Kerényi (1976:45) writes that waking the god was done in a nocturnal ceremony, like so many of the Bacchic rituals. We see here that Dionysos certainly is a symbol of a deity with powers to transcend the realm that separates the living from the dead. The Bacchoi mentioned in the gold tablets seek to mimick this, whether it be to gain a release from the pangs of an unhappy fate in the Netherworld, release from the wheel of reincarnation, or to gain the status of immortality as Semele, Dionysos' human mother gained when Dionysos retrieved her from the grips of death.

Before I leave the lustration ritual of baptism I will take a closer look at a baptismal hymn from *Paul's letters to the Ephesians* 5:14: «Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.» Wagner argues strongly against this hymn being taken from a cultic Demeter-hymn. The hymn is taken from the satirical play *The Frogs – Ranae* by Aristophanes, and as it reveals secrets from the Eleusinian cult we hear it resonates with the presence of Bacchus in the character of Iacchos and the nocturnal rituals from the baths of Corinth where lamps was used to invoke angels and/or nymphs (see chapter on **Corinth**). Like the Bacchoi gold lamellae promises, the *mystai* are under the protection of Persephone when they die: «Thrice blessed are those mortals who have seen these rites and thus enter into Hades; for them alone there is life, for the others all is misery.» (Sophocles *Fr.* 837 quoted in Burkert 1985:289). We hear the echo from the gold lamellae nr 26 a,b: «Now you have died and now you have come into being, O thrice happy one, on this same day.» (Graf and Johnston 2007). Burkert also quotes a funeral inscription from a hierophant of the Demeter/Kore cult that had shown to the *mystai* «that death is not an evil but something good.» (1985:289).

This is the hymn from Aristophanes: *Ranae* 340ff, IV

«Ἔγειρε· ὃ φλογέας λαμπάδας ἐν γεροῖ γὰρ ἦκει τινάσσων

Ἴακχ' ὃ Ἴακχε νυκτέρου τελετῆς φωσφόρος ἀστήρ.

Φλογὶ φεγγεται δὲ λειμών

-Come, arise, from sleep awaking, come the fiery torches shaking,

O Iacchus! O Iacchus!

Morning Star that shinest nightly.

Lo, the mead is blazing brightly», (translated version from The Internet Classics Archive)



The text from Ephesians 5:14 is as follows:

«ἔγειρε ὁ καθεύδων καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,  
καὶ ἐπιφάνσει σοι ὁ Χριστός»

- Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and christ will shine on you.»

Wagner do not find any similarity in these texts: «The texts, whose difference is more apparent than their kinship, are so dissimilar that the first cannot possibly have been the basis for the second. As they stand, they have really nothing in common except the one word: ἔγειρε.» (Wagner 1967:74). ἔγειρε – means arise, or wake. But is this really so? In the first Iacchus comes with his torch, lights the way and leads the festive dance, in the second Christ appears to give light to his followers. Iacchus is called light-bearer and Lucius - the light giver, he is the light and as Christ, he guides the way with his light. Wagner emphasizes the difference between the texts, pointing to the atmosphere of the first text, that the people called upon to wake are exhausted from feasting and frolicking, but the text from the Ephesians talk about waking from the sleep of death. The context of the first is cultic debauchery, the other the sacrament of Christian baptism.

However, the tone of the hymns mimic each other. Both starts with a call to wake and rise from sleep, and a divinity comes bringing light to shine brightly on the members of both cults. I will not speculate why Wagner finds the comparison so disturbing, but it is worth noting who Iacchus is. Burkert calls him a demon called upon in the cultic procession of Eleusis, with rhythmic shouts of *Iakch' O Iakche*. Iacchos is by many thought to be «an epithet of Dionysos» (Burkert 1985:287), a child of Persephone, or a son of Demeter, incorporating the wealth of the earth as his mother is the goddess of the dry gifts of nature such as corn.

Kerényi (2008:244) writes that Iacchos is also the laughing child in Baubo's womb, who cheers up the grieving Demeter as she is desperately looking for her daughter Persephone/Kore stolen by Hades. Baubo and her wild grotesque jestering and the laughing child in her gaping womb makes Demeter break her fast, as the arrival of Iacchus as the Morning Star does for the *mystai* at Eleusis. At first appearance of the stars the rites of purification and frightening initiation ends in a nocturnal feast, the stars pronounce the beginning of the night which belongs to the following day, cf. Burkert 1985:287.

### **Bacchic purification rituals.**

Preliminary washings was also included in the initiation ritual of the mysteries of Dionysos. Livy tells of how the mother of Pulius Aebutius had made a vow to have him initiated into the Bacchic

rites (*History of Rome* 39.9.4, cf. Ferguson 2009:30). The boy would need to fast for ten days, at the end of which the mother would take him to a banquet and the shrine after a washing rite. Pausanias in *Description of Greece* 9.20.4 writes that the women of Tanagra went down to the sea to wash before the orgies of Dionysos. Leinieks (1996:297) treats the Dionysiac rites as a therapeutic katharsis. The Bacchic revelry had purifying traits as did the rites that the priests of Orpheus peddled at the houses of the rich, and so did ritual music (Leinieks refers to Aristotle's *Politics* 1342 a,7-13. 1996:299). In *Bacchae* verses 76-77, the chorus sings of the reveling in the mountains as rites of purification. Disease was thought of as some kind of contamination you could get rid of through the rights sort of purification. Leinieks quotes Aristoxenos who claimed that the Pythagoreans used the art of medicine to purify the body and music to purify the soul (Leinieks 1996:300). We cannot forget the murals from the Villa dei Misteri, depicting human women entering the divine sphere. On the left wall as one enters the crimson room a scene shows a seated woman being washed in preparation for the cultic activity. Another woman pours liquid from a pitcher over the right hand of the seated woman. Zuntz (1964:181-2) says the liquid poured is wine and claims the woman seated is a priestess of Bacchus, her hair is covered by a turban-like veil, and we are reminded of the turban Dionysos as the stranger tells Pentheus to wrap around his hair to disguise himself as a woman (Euripides 1996:833,929,1115).

The epiphany of the god can come in many forms, but the most usual ones are wine, as we have seen, a mask representing Dionysos, the satyrs, or a phallus revealed in a *liknon*. This winnowing basket can also hide the mask. There needed be no other symbol than the mask to symbolize that the god was present. Burkert tells of a scarecrow-like figure where the mask of Dionysos hangs on top of a linen-clad column. The cloth was sometimes stretched by a horizontal crossbar making it a crucifix looking sign. This cruciform masked-column was perhaps present at the Anthesteria festival (Burkert 1985:240). Kerényi places the link to Anthesteria as he describes a scene from a marble sarcophagus (1976:378), showing an aged silenus bringing a toy-like representation of the cruciformed shape to the little child Dionysos. Kerényi writes (Ibid) that the cloth-clad linnen with the mask was a representation of the god during his stay in the Underworld. Is silenus predicting the future for the boy as he gives him the cruciform, or was he simply trying to amuse the child, sitting on the lap of one of his nurses, with a primitive doll? This scarecrow-like representation of the god might have inspired the crucified figure on the Berlin-seal with the names of Orpheus and Bacchus inscribed underneath (Herrero 2010:125). It could have been a source for inspiration for the one who chose to have the seal made to depict an Orphic Bacchus as the crucified Jesus. We see here an iconographic mix of the figures Jesus and Dionysos evoked together to give the user of the amulet

protection from two evidently so similar they could be depicted as one and the same. We will see more iconographical representation of a joint worship of these different deities in the chapter **A concluding discussion.**

The cloth draping the column is somewhat similar to the scanty loincloth holding the phallus and the horse tail of the masked satyrs appearing at festivals (Burkert 1985:166), and the loincloth covering the young boy who was with Jesus in the Getsemane-garden before Jesus' arrests. In *Mark* 14:51, he is seen fleeing naked from the spot: «A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.»

Smith (1973) interprets this as a sign of a nocturnal ritual performed by Jesus. Smith suggests the fact there is no reference to such a ritual in the gospels, is because certain rituals were secret and reserved for the instruction of the advanced followers of the Christ cult. The author writes about a fragment of a letter, supposedly by Clement of Alexandria, answering questions about a secret Gospel by Mark. Clement advises Theodore, the letter-receiver to deny the existence of such a Gospel and to keep on silencing «the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians» (1973:446, verse 2).

Smith interprets Clement of Alexandria's knowledge of the the secret gospel and his urging Theodore to keep it secret, as proof that it was read only to those being initiated into «the greater mysteries» and that Jesus administered to at least one of his followers (the young man) a nocturnal initiation in which he taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God» (Ibid:196). The author reads the secret ritual as a nocturnal baptism and points to several indications in the New Testament that the baptismal lustration was performed at night. In *Acts* 16:33 the baptism is at night, the same is the footwashing in *John* 13:4-5, this is also a ritual Jesus performs naked but for a loincloth that he then removes to dry the feet of the disciples. Nicodemus (*John* 3:1-3) comes at night to learn the teachings of Jesus. Nocturnal initiation rituals were also performed in the cults of Dionysos.

### **Nocturnal Bacchic rites**

In Euripides *Bacchae* verse 485-6, Pentheus asks the Stranger if the night or the day is chosen to celebrate the rites of the gods, Dionysos answers that the darkness of night is preferred, it adds a certain solemnity to the mind. Livy (39.9) writes about a nocturnal rite where men shriek prophecies as if mad in frenzy and torches light miraculously after having been extinguished in the sea. There are also certain activities performed in the evening at the Anthesteria festival. The queen to the *archon basileus*, is given as wife to Dionysos and this «marriage» takes place at night.

Burkert (1985:240) imagines that the mask on the column is made out to represent the god on this night. The wine jugs with his life-essence have been opened to sample the harvest from last vintage

and here Dionysos is in person. It is easy to think that a man wearing the mask would enact the god as a final celebration of his presence. At the day of the pots, 13<sup>th</sup> day of the Anthesteria festival, all kinds of grain is boiled with honey into some kind of primitive porridge (Ibid:240). The god of the wet fruits of the earth are here a god that can, just as well, be celebrated with the dry fruits of the earth. He is not very different from Christ in the sense they are both wine and bread. Everybody is included, higher levels of society is present with the lower, the only one excluded are the other gods, but Dionysos and Hermes. As in the cult of Christ, the doors are open to everybody, excluded are only the «dumb idols» and the other gods. The normal life is set aside, a new time has begun with masked mummery, haunting spirits and drunken revelry. Extraordinary experiences seems to be a special feature of the worship of the god, Burkert (1985:290) finds it therefore not coincidental that the cults of this god is the cults that have gone through greatest changes. «As the individual gains in independence, the Dionysos cult becomes a vehicle for the separation of private groups from the polis.» (Ibid:291). There were public worships of the god, but also private ones, secretive and exclusive for the initiated. Burkert writes (Ibid:291) they all take place at night. The separation between the sexes becomes less expressed, both have equal parts in the cultic rituals, which are not locative bound, but can be celebrated where it is suited, even though it is natural to imagine a cave or underground locations to add to this mystery being revealed when light and eyes fall upon it.

What is interesting, and according to Burkert (1985:162), unparalleled in the rest of Greek religion is that both votary and the god is called Bacchus. Did the one who made the amulet of the crucified Orpheus say that Jesus was a «Bacchus», a votary of the god? Or maybe he just found his teachings and mysteries so identifiable with the teachings of the Bacchoi and their rituals.

Dionysos acts through purifications (*katharmoi*) and initiations (*teletai*), according to Burkert (Ibid:292) this happens through ecstatic revelry. We recognize the ecstasy from the Christ cult where Paul worries about the Corinthians being considered mad if an uninitiated came by and heard them babble in tongues and uttering prophecies. The Bacchic name for the initiates raving is *Baccheia*, and it is through this that the initiate becomes a *bacchos*. I would think the presence of the wine was inductive in this respect. No wonder the Corinthians found it proper to indulge at the communion meal, if I am right in my thesis that many of early church goers had participated in many of the feasts celebrating other gods, the ravings at the church services might not have seemed all that different from the pot-opening at the Anthesteria, or the Bacchic cult. Burkert mentions two stimulants available to the Bacchoi to encourage the Dionysic ravings, one is the alcohol of the wine, the other is sexual excitement.

If there were naked baptism and flimsy loincloths shielding the initiates in the Christ cult, we may have this stimulant here too. Nocturnal orgies and sexual immorality is strictly warned against by Paul (*1 Cor. 10:7-8*), but I will not draw conclusions on speculative evidence. Both sexes were welcomed into the early church, but there is nothing to suggest they did not have segregated baptismal rites. The feet-washing in *John 13:4-5*, is a nocturnal ritual where only his male disciples are mentioned present, we can safely assume this happened in a privat *thiasoi* in a symposiac environment. There may have been homoerotic overtones present, but no more so than in a normal all-male gathering, like the club or bathhouse.

### **Bloodshed and Dionysos.**

There is a clear link between wine and blood, and not just as the blood of the grapes, or in the sacrificed Dionysos poured as a libation to the other gods, there is another ominous side to wine in the story of the first person introduces to wine by Dionysos. The peasant Ikarios was slain by other peasants as they thought he tried to poison them (Burkert 1985:164). Unlike the images of the Villa dei Misteri depicting a scene of pure joy and love centering on Dionysos and his Ariadne, there was sadness tied to the celebrations of their marriage as well, Burkert writes that on Naxos there were two Ariadne festivals, one of revelry, the other of lamentation and sorrow (1985:164). There are elements of bloodshed and dismemberment in the cultic acts tied to this god, «maenads with a dismembered fawn is often portrayed» (Burkert 1985:164). Both theophagy, eating the god, and omophagy, eating raw meat is intimated. Kerényi (1976) renders an image of Dionysiac sacrifice, (illustration nr. 38 in *Ibid*), which show two maenads holding a sacrificial animal between them, one holding a knife. Biale (2007:26) refers to a vase painting of a Dionysian rite in which a satyr wields the knife as a maenad helps to hold the animal as blood pours into a bowl.

There is something forboding in the frenzy that can fall over his worshipers. A frenzy that can turn into pure raving madness where the most heinous deeds are committed without the apparent knowledge of the ones performing the deeds. We have of course the mother of Pentheus tearing his son limb from limb and then parading with his head stuck on the end of thyrsos (Euripides 1996:1141), thinking she has been part of killing a fearsome lion.

Dionysos is a god with two sides, sometimes depicted as old bearded, and fat, other times as young, slender and almost effeminate (Burkert 1985:167). He is tied to the Chthonic realm as another version of Hades almost, other times he is the epiphany of life, as the laughing child in Baubo's womb - bringing happiness to Demeter and spring to the dormant earth. He is the sacrificed

child, removed from the throne Zeus sat him on, giving him the reign of the world, and torn apart, boiled, roasted, and poured out as a libation to the gods, his body in the blood of the wine. But he is also reawakened in the cave at Parnassos, bringing another summer for the harvest and a successful psychopomp, leading his mother Persephone from the realm of death to the immortal gods on Olympus. He brings hope that the guilt from the titanic side of man will be purified and atoned before the dead arrives in Persephone's queendom and reinstated among the heavenly race from which the dead descends, being Dionysic as well in nature.

### **Bloodshed in the Christ cult**

The lack of altars for the sacrifice of animals in Christianity, has made it seem like a blood-less religion, where the emphasis is on man's actions and how he behaves, and no doubt the lack of altars had much to say for the development of the Christian and the Jewish religions.

«...in the Greek and Jewish systems man's condition and the specific occasion determined – and were expressed through – the choice of victim and the nature of the sacrifice, in Christianity man's condition was communicated to God directly, without a victim being the mediator on the path to God. Before the establishment of the cultic act of Christian communion, the focus of Christianity was on human actions and life attitudes. And it was a feature original to Christianity that the abolition of the animal victim was not necessarily connected to vegetarianism, at least in the form of Christianity which prevailed in the following centuries.» (Petropoulou 2008: 283-4)

We see here the similarity between the early church and Orphism. It is the initiation and then man's actions that keeps up the link, or contact between «convert» and god. Reading the respective *heroi logoi* of each group could tie Jesus-followers, and Orphic Bacchoi to the religious teachings they had been instructed in when they were first initiated. Traces of the Bacchic cults have been found all over the Greco-Roman area, almost. Gold lamellae have been found in the north and south of Italy, on the island of Sicily, Crete and Greece and Macedonia, and the earliest evidence of an Orphic theogony and doctrine was found in the Olbia, in the Greek colony of Miletus, on the north-coast of the Black Sea. Orphic Bacchoi has also been found in Egypt, witnessed by the Gurôb papyrus. I will return to this a little later, but I will now look at the traces of blood-shed in the Christ cult.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the presence of wine at the Eucharistic meal is not only about wine, or the symbol of dying and rising vegetation, but blood. Like the wine is the blood of the grape, it is given in libation to Yahweh and the other Greek gods, but it is also a symbol of the blood in man, like Paul says, writing he is already being spent, poured in libation to God - his death will be a drink-offering to god. The blood is of great importance in the cult of Yahweh and was repeated and reinterpreted in the rather cannibalistic ritual of the Christian Eucharist. The first covenant between Yahweh and his believers was of blood, poured over the altar, but also over the

people.

As the blood of the grape was given in libation to Yahweh it could also be drunk by his people, a sacrifice shared by them both. The blood poured over the people in the first covenant instigated a blood sacrifice that the people later on would have to perform and give Yahweh without touching it again. Strict rules against the uncleanness of blood and drinking it, would be broken when Jesus came and started a new covenant, again blood is being spent as Jesus dies. Before he dies he gives his disciples his blood to drink, ordering them to continue drinking his symbolical blood in the cup of wine. Like the first covenant the blood of the sacrifice binds the people and Yahweh together by sharing the drink-offering of the blood, but unlike the first covenant the blood is continued being drunk as this second covenant made away with the first one.

David Biale (2007) explains the priestly dietary laws of Israelite religion as political more than theological, creating a temple-monopoly on sacrifice, and enhancing the forbidden nature of other kind of slaughter and ritual use of blood as abominations (13). Yet Biale emphasizes that Israel did this not in a religious vacuum: «Especially around issues of blood, Greek religion was significantly closer to that of the Israelites than were the rituals of more proximate Near Eastern cultures.» (Ibid:14). Biale points to a filological similarity to show the link between Greek and Israelite sacrificial customs, as he writes that the word for altar in Greek *bamos* is virtually identical to the Hebrew word *bamah* (Ibid:26). As opposed to Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Minoan-Mycanaean offerings, Greek and Biblical sacrifices involved both burning and eating, and both have a strong focus on the sacrificial blood in splatting it on the altar and strict rules of how to dispose of it properly. Biale writes (Ibid:26) that the blood have purifying qualities, as we have seen earlier in this chapter. The blood of the sacrificial animal can wipe away guilt as it is in the Demeter/Kore cult. In *John* the flesh and blood of Jesus has redemptive qualities. Biale (Ibid:28) claims that the prohibitions on eating blood in *Leviticus* 17 has sexual overtones when it refers to a goat cult. Biale sees this as the rites of Dionysos with clear references to unbridled eroticism (Ibid:28).

In *Exodus* 24:6-8 a bull has been sacrificed, Moses throws half of the blood on the altar of God and after reading from the book of the covenant, throws the other half on the people: «Clearly, this blood is meant to effect an initiation, or anointing of the people who are entering into the covenant with God» (Ibid:40). As the people about to consecrate an offering to take a vow as a Nazarite in *Numbers* 6:2-4, cf. chapter on **wine cults around the Mediterranean**, is separated from God through abstaining from anything associated with wine, the blood in *Exodus* 24:6-8 instigates a blood-brotherhood between Israel and Yahweh.

Biale refers to Geller (Ibid:44) who sees this blood cult of the priest fed into Christianity, but as a spiritualized substitute for sacrifice. «Indeed, on the «eating» of blood, Judaism and Christianity

clearly parted company: whereas Judaism retained the Biblical horror at consumption of blood, Christianity ultimately made the «eating» of its founder and the «drinking» of his blood a central sacrament.» (Ibid:44). The synoptic *Gospels* rely directly on the motive of *Exodus* 24, here Jesus' blood represented in the cup of wine really the blood of the covenant. In *Mark* 14:24 the blood «Moses had thrown on the people is instead drunk in the form of wine, which the Hebrew Bible calls the «blood of the grape» (*Deut.* 32:14)» (Biale 2007:53). This sacrifice of Jesus' is once and for all, it needs not be repeated, and Jesus death truly makes the covenant (*diatheke*) effective. A new testament has come into effect and there has been a death, making the Jesus-followers beneficiaries of his will.

Biale writes that for most of the church fathers, including Clement, the «drinking» of Christ's blood was emphasized as being a «symbolic prefiguration of an allegorical sacrifice» (Ibid:61). Biale suspects that this allegorical interpretation was due to the fact that their congregants, at home in the Greco-Roman society was so used to the normal ritual of sacrifice, they might hold more literal meanings to the blood of Christ. To avoid the Eucharist from becoming a blood-cult, they started to withdraw the cup from the communion meal in the Middle Ages (Ibid:61). The church fathers might very well have wished to differentiate the cult of Christ from its competitors, and this might very well have been because of their apparent similarities, or, as I have claimed, because they might confuse them, to the effect they continued to declare allegiance to the cults of Bacchus.

## Orphic eschatology

In the passage from Plato's *Republic*, book 2, section 364b-365a, we found that the author writes about the wandering priests and seers of Musaios and Orpheus offering books and initiations which will release and purify the initiates from wrongdoings in life and after death through sacrifices and play. Parker (1995:484)) sees the attributions of such books to Orpheus as a means to present some kind of authority for «religious revelation». Orpheus, the famous singer and (successful or non-successful) psychopomp, and inventor of many rites, could give this authority to new religious movements. These books of Orpheus are generally thought to have been used in connection with rites, the Bacchic revelry - βακχεύειν is mentioned by Euripides (*Hippolytes*) (Ibid:484) and we just saw the references to sacrifices and play from Plato. *Baccheia* identifies the Orphic rites with the Bacchic and according to Parker (1995:484) so does Herodotus. Herodotus also identify the Orphics with Pythagoreans. Parker warns about this identification, saying that we seldom hear of Orphics, but Pythagoreans were much well known. If the sellers of the books of Orpheus managed to initiate people, they were priests without congregations. Unlike Paul who wrote to churches around the Mediterranean and «sold» his message, the *Orpheotelestai* did not create lasting congregations.



Did the Orphic live a certain way, when initiated? Parker cannot answer conclusive about this. Euripides links Orphism with vegetarianism, and there is an inscription from southern Italy that speak of an Orphic burial plot: «it is unlawful for anyone to be deposited here unless he has been initiated to Bacchos (inscription quoted in Ibid:485). The find of the gold lamellae and the Olbia tablets signals something of the same, when initiated the link to the teachings of these Orphic books continue to matter for the initiated. These bone-plaques consist of the oldest Orphic evidence we have, dating from the fifth century B.C.E. found near the Black Sea. These bone-plaques mentions Dionysos and Orphics (tablet A in Fritz and Johnston 2007:185).

However, the message of the Orphic *telestai* might have contained discrepant and contradictory doctrines (Parker 1995:486), and Orpheus was not only associated with Dionysos, known as the founder of rites he was associated with the Eleusiniain Mysteries at Athens (Ibid:486). We have already heard of the links between Bacchus and the Demeter/Kore cult, so this association might have been quite understandable.

Parker writes that the texts ascribed to Orpheus was of a particular kind (Ibid 486), they present a new theogony as mentioned in the **Introduction** of this thesis. Besides this, and the poems and hymns ascribed to Orpheus there hints that there may have been other texts that could have helped the purifications and the release from the troubles of the initiate, Parker refers to hints about «charms and cures» (Ibid:486). Given the existence of the gold lamellae, we cannot forget the eschatology the beggar priests of Orpheus offered. An eschatology that sought to explain not only the order of the cosmos and the origin of it and the gods, but also the origin of man. Plato writes in *Cratylus* (400c, F8) that those around Orpheus gave the body its present name σῶμα, because the soul is being punished and has the body to fence the soul in like a prison – σῶμα. This might have to do with the Titanic guilt within man I have already written about the theogony of Orpheus, verified in the oldest surviving Greek books of the Derveni papyrus (Parker 1995:488). Parker claims that the theogony might have been a secret poem, kept from the uninitiated like the secret gospels mentioned in Smith (1973).

The theogony (I refer here to Parker 1995, and how he retells it) repeats a lot of what is known from the theogony of Hesiod, but extends the list by making Zeus castrate his father, mate with his mother Rhea and his daughter Persephone. In the rhapsodic theogony Oereanos have two predecessors, the brilliant «first born» (protogonos) known as Phanes or Eriekapaios (and he has several other names), and Night. Protogonos creates the gods and the universe, but after Zeus swallows Protogonos he recreates the world from his stomach. I will not retell what I have already written in the **Introduction**, but go on to say that the discovery of the Derveni papyrus confirmed that the rhapsodic theogony was indeed ancient Orphic material (Ibid:491), and that existed at least

two Orphic theogonies by the late fourth century (492). There is also an intimation that Protogonos, Zeus and Dionysos is in some sense the same god, (Protogonos might have been born from an egg, and we remember that Zeus impregnated Persephone in the shape of a snake).

The story where Dionysos is the son of Persephone ends in the blood-shed story that to many embody the very core of Orphism (Ibid:494). According to the rhapsodic theogony, Zeus instates the baby Dionysos to be his successor, the jealous Titans, the chaos-forces of earth lures him away with toys that later have become symbols used in Orphism, among them the mirror. A bronze mirror was found in Olbia (Fritz and Johnston 2007: 187), containing the Bacchic cries of Euai, Euai!, like Iacchos, Iacchos! was shouted in the Eleusinian procession. The cry of Euai, Euai! evoked Bacchus. They slay him, boil and roast him, while his heart survives, given to Semele who becomes pregnate with Dionysos, therefore ensuring that he can be born again. The titans are punished by Zeus who burns them to ashes with his lightning bolt, and man is made out of the titanic ashes.

Olympiodorus (Parker 1995:495) is the only source for the conception of man containing both a titanic and a Dionysiac side to his nature, needing release from this inherited guilt to escape the prison of the body. Who better to call upon to pardon this guilt, but Bacchus the god who was slain?

Parker means this theogony of a disturbing theophagy could explain the secrecy of it and its use in initiation (Ibid: 495). He refers to a fragment by Pindar who declares that the best roles in future incarnations will fall to those who have been pardoned by Persephone for ancient grief (Ibid:496). There is no other myth known that can explain this allusion to ancient grief, except the story of Dionysos death and the titanic guilt inherited by man. Parker writes that: «it has always been obvious that there is some affinity between the gold leaves and the kind of Orphic doctrines that we have been considering.» (Ibid:497) The soul is of heavenly descend and has paid penalty for unjust deeds. The similarity between the gold lamellae and the bone plaques is explained if we think that the beggar priest of Orpheus had the story with him as he traveled to «sell» his message. Again I am reminded of the many travels of the apostles and Paul, «selling» their message.

It was the find of the leaf from Hipponium in 1974 that confirmed the suspicion that the leaves were Bacchic, as it speaks of *mystai* and *bakkhoi* (Tablet nr. 1 in Fritz and Johnston 2007:5). They were in the shape of tiny ivy leaves, reminding us of the branding of the Jews in *3Maccabees* 2:29, mentioned earlier. If the shape of the ivy leaves matters, we see that the Jews were forced to wear, to the end of their lives, an insurance that they would be accepted as Bacchoi even in death, whether they sought allegiance with this god or not.

The Orphic doctrine of the gold lamellae, sets the soul against the body in an interesting dualistic relationship - the soul being heavenly, of Dionysiac stock, the body titanic and guilty. With the pardon of Dionysos and Persephone, the soul can escape the prison of the body and join the heroes

and the divine in its rightful place.

Kerényi writes that Protogonos, Zeus and Dionysos are one and the same thing as he writes about the origin of Dionysos as being part of the everlasting couple of regeneration that is always the same even if the participants appear with different names. Dionysos is Zeus, the Father of the Gods, at the same time as being his son. So when he is part of the eternal couple of birth, he is Zeus with Rhea, or Zeus and Demeter, or Dionysos and Persephone, or Dionysos and Ariadne. According to the Orphic stories, which I have related, Dionysos is born by Persephone who is impregnated by Zeus in the shape of a snake, «the most naked form of life», according to Kerényi, «reduced to pure *zoë*» (Kerényi 1976). This is also a much older story, according to Kerényi.

Here we have recaptured the first act of a mythical drama that must be assigned to Minoan Crete and discloses a style more ancient than the of the palaces. The child in whose birth this first act culminates is horned; the bull, either as such or in a partly human form, dominates the second act. The ritual form of this act, the rending of a bull or some other horned sacrificial animal, most often a he-goat, became a Dionysian sacrifice. This sacrificial act, with all the details representing the indestructibility of life amid destruction, can be reconstructed: it gave rise to Greek tragedy and remained throughout antiquity the least striking, but most universal, of Dionysian rites. (Ibid: 115).

Dionysos is horned, as Zagreus is, another deity linked to a mask. Dionysos is also linked to satyrs, creatures with mask-like faces, I will return to this in my **concluding discussion**.

Aischylos bears witness to the contradictory identity of Zagreus, on the one hand with a «subterranean Zeus,» on the other with his subterranean son. «Zagreus», «he who captures alive,» was also a cover name, a circumlocution for a great god, in fact the greatest god of all time. He visits his hidden daughter in a cave, and she bears him to himself as his own son. The «mystic» feature which we have presupposed in the relationship between Dionysos and Ariadne here appears in an archaic myth in which generation and birth never go beyond the same couple. Taking his mother or daughter to wife, the son or husband begets a mystic child who in turn will court only his mother.» (Ibid: 114)

The Orphic texts attributed to the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Aristobulus av Phaneas, written about by, among others Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Justin Martyr, Origen/Celsus, and Eusebius Caesariensis, bishop in Caesarea is a hexametric poem. This is an interesting poem because it is in all probability an old Orphic text rewritten to fit monotheistic Jewish belief (Berntzen 2009:317). It is attributed to Pseudo-Orpheus and can be found as the fragments 248 and 299 in Holladay's "Orphica" (Holladay 1996). In the poem Orpheus teaches his son Musaios about the only true God. Musaios is here interpreted to be just a rewriting of the name Moses. What is interesting about the poem is that it shows that Orphic doctrines were of interest to the Alexandrian Jews. Liebes writes about the name Erikapaios and that it might very well be of Hebrew origin, due to its resemblance to *erekh appayim*, meaning «life giver» (Liebes 1993:74). To Liebes there are certain similarities between the Orphic and Hebrew myths, saying that «Judaism exerted enormous spiritual influence in the Hellenistic period and a great deal of Jewish material is also found in the writings of non-Jews.» (Ibid:70). Liebes suggests that some Kabbalistic myths may be very ancient, and that before

they turned up in the Kabbalistic writings of the Middle Ages, they might have stopped by Orphism, influencing it with ideas about the heavenly spheres and the origin of evil. He writes that the first reference to Erikapaios in the Gurôb (Egypt) papyrus, it appears in one phrase: «Irikepaige, soisom me», meaning «Irikepaigus, save me!» (Ibid:74). This cry is common in Judaism, Liebes claims, and points to the line following Irikepaigus, save me!: «Dionysos is One.» This is also a famous Jewish religious motto: «God is One.» We see here that Hellenistic Judaism was influenced by Orphic myths, and as Liebes would have, the other way around as well. When I turn to the texts by the church fathers, we shall see that claiming Jewish influence on Greek-Roman texts, philosophy and religion, became a standard form of attack in apologetic texts.

## A concluding discussion

As I come to the end of my thesis I do not wish to leave my discussion on the similarities between Christianity and the cult of Dionysos completely. I have looked closely at the texts of the Christ cult, but there is a famous Greek text that many feel speaks about Bacchic rites, it certainly contains significant myths about the god Dionysos. This text was so popular it has influenced many writers, what is less known is to what degree the text influenced the writings of early Christianity. The text is of course Euripides' *Bacchae*.

### Euripides' *Bacchae* and its influence on early Christian literature

Richard Seaford in his book on the *Bacchae* says this of its transmission:

*Bacchae* was in antiquity, as it is today, one of the most popular of Greek tragedies. As well as being studied and performed, and influencing Roman drama it was represented in visual art and frequently cited in both Christian and non-Christian literature. The citations have to be taken account of by the textual critic, as do the surviving scraps of ancient papyri of the play. We glimpse third century BC schoolchildren reciting «my looks are sacred» (494) in the presence of a tragic mask of Dionysos (Callim. *Epigr.* 48), Agaue performing with the head of Crassus at the Parthian court in 53 BC (1109-71n.), and the emperor Nero singing the play (or more likely extracts from it) to the kithara.

What was it that ensured the wide currency of *Bacchae*? Apart from its theatrical and literary power, a factor was probably the widespread importance of the cult of Dionysos, including his mysteries, throughout antiquity. This importance made Dionysos a rival to Christ, a rivalry no less intense for the similarities between the two figures.

*Bacchae* influenced the New Testament to a greater extent than has been realised. (Euripides (Seaford) 1996:52-3)

It is sometimes unclear whether the *Bacchae's* influence on the literature of the early church is due to its popularity at the time and its literary qualities, or due to the similarities between Dionysos and Christ made for an intense rivalry. Intense rivalry because the similarities could and did lead to unfortunate comparisons and mix-ups. I will list some of the most striking examples of the texts influence on the New Testament and the writings of Clement of Alexandria, using Seaford's English translation.

I have already listed at least three such influences in the chapter **The wine cult of Christ**, talking of Dionysos being poured out like wine and a drink offering.

The account of Jesus' arrest in the *Gospel of John* and *Matthew* is another such example of the *Bacchae's* influence. In *Matthew* 26:50, Jesus does not resist arrest, but waits calmly for the man to take him away, he even calls him friend: «Jesus replied, «Friend, do what you came for.» Then the man stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.» In *John* 18:4-8, Jesus is equally patiently waiting, he is omniscient and fears nothing. He must encourage the men who have come to arrest him to do what they have come for: «Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, «Who is it you want?» «Jesus of Nazareth,» they replied. «I am he,» Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, «I am he,» they drew back

and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, «Who is it you want?» And they said, «Jesus of Nazareth.»

In *Bacchae* (439-40), Dionysos is master of the situation and laughs as he lets the men tie him and lead him away: «but laughing he told us both to bind him and to lead him off, and he waited, making my task easy.» In the passage (434-518) we see a conflict between the human authority of Pentheus that wants to arrest the Stranger (Dionysos) that he finds to be a provocative imposter, and religious belief: even his faithful servant has been swayed by Dionysos and wants to join his cult, Pentheus stands isolated like the Pharisees in *John* 7:45-7, that want the temple guards to bring Jesus in, but sees the guards returning empty-handed, swayed by Jesus like the others: «Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, «Why didn't you bring him in?» «No one ever spoke the way this man does,» the guards declared. «You mean he has deceived you also?» the Pharisees retorted.»

In *Mark* 8:18, Jesus scolds the disciples who fails to understand his simile on the contaminating influence of the Pharisees and Herod: «Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?» Eyesight alone is evidently not enough to determine what we actually perceive. In *Luke* 24:16 it is Jesus himself the disciples fail to see: «Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.» In *Bacchae* (502), it is Pentheus' disrespect or impiety that prevents him from seeing Dionysos standing right in front of him: «σὺ δ' ἄσεβης αὐτὸς ὢν οὐκ εἰσορᾷς - But you being yourself impious do not see him.»

There is a large consensus among scholars that *The Acts of the Apostles* is written by the same person that wrote *The Gospel According to Luke*, however, it is written by someone well-versed in the work of Euripides, especially the *Bacchae*.

5:39 speaks of Peter persisting in obeying God and warns the high priests from trying to fight God: «But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.» This resonates the impossible fight attempted by Pentheus, in vers 45 Dionysos says he fights against deity (θεομαχεῖ). «The word θεομαχεῖ normally means attempting to do the impossible» (Leinieks 1996:267)

In *Acts*. 12:7,10, the chains that bind Peter falls off his wrists and he is released from prison by what seemed a vision: «Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. «Quick, get up!» he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.» And 10: «They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it.» There is another miraculous freeing in

5:19: «But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.» And in 16:26 «Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.», where Paul and Silas is freed.

The passage in *Bacchae* (447-8), shows a striking similarity in its story of chains coming loose and prison doors opening to free the followers of another deity, this time Dionysos. «All by themselves the chains were released from their feet, and the bolts undid the doors without mortal hand.»

We find another parallel and perhaps a relation between verse 506, where Pentheus is warned by the Stranger about his limitations before a divinity and his confusion: «οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τί ζῆς, οὐ θ' ὁ δρᾷς, οὐ θ' ὅς τις εἶ.- «You do not know what your life is nor what you are doing nor who you are.», and *Acts*. 17:28: «ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν ὡς καὶ τινες τῶν καθ' ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν», - «for in him we live and move and have our being.» Only here there is no confusion at all as Paul proclaims the identity of his God, claiming that the people of Athens are already worshipping him, only missing his name, since an altar (17:23) bears the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.

In the passage 576-641 in *Bacchae* we find the Epiphany of Dionysos, and he manifests himself in many ways, earthquake, thunder, lightning, fire on his human mother's Semele's tomb, followed by collapse of a house, and his booming voice. We find another epiphany in *Acts*. with lightning and light in the conversion of Paul, that seems like a rite of passage. *Acts*. 9:3-9 tells of Paul seeing a light flashing around him, he falls to the ground as he hears the voice of Jesus that Paul has been persecuting. Paul is demanded to rise from the ground, his travelling companions are struck speechless because they hear the voice, but sees no one. Paul is rendered blind for three days where he neither eats or drinks. Like in *Bacchae* we have light (φῶς) (630-1), people falling to the ground, a voice of someone invisible divine, a demand to get up off the ground (606-9): «shaking apart the house of Pentheus. But raise up your bodies and take courage, putting trembling from your flesh. Chorus: O greatest light for us of the joyful-crying bacchanal, how gladly I looked on you in my lonely desolation.» This story about Paul's conversion is repeated in *Acts*. 22:6-11. We find the earthquake again in 16:26 as the chains are broken and the prison doors opened by divine intervention. In 26:14, we hear of Paul's resisting conversion, where the voice of Jesus says to Paul on the road to Damascus: «It is hard for you to kick against the goads», a metaphor also used about Pentheus' resistance to accept the cult of Dionysos, as the Stranger comments on Pentheus' stubbornness to accept defeat to a deity: «I would sacrifice to him rather than in anger kick against the goads, a mortal against a god.» (795).

There is a combination of light and voice in *Acts*. 9:3-8, 22:6-7 and the *John's Book of Revelation* (18:1): «After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority and the

earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted...»

In *Luke* 17:24 we are told that the epiphany of the Son of Man will be like lightning that illuminates the sky: «For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.» This resonates in another miraculous epiphany scene in *Bacchae* (1078-1088) «A voice from the air, Dionysos it seemed, shouted: «Young women, I bring you the one who ridicules you and me and my rites. Punish him. He said that and simultaneously a flash of holy fire stood between heaven and earth. The air fell silent. The wooden glen held its leaves motionless. No voice of a beast could be heard. Not hearing the sound clearly they bolted upright and cocked their heads. He shouted again.» In this passage I am citing Leinieks translation, (1996:100), saying this about the Greek language of the text: «As the language in the scene makes clear, however, what is actually described is not the sound of a voice but thunder and lightning. In other words, the god speaks to his worshipers in thunder.» (Ibid:100).

Clement of Alexandria is also a diligent user of Euripides *Bacchae*. In *Stromateis* 4:25.162, he puts the sentences that Dionysos says, in the guise of the Stranger, in the mouth of Christ. Dionysos explains (470, 472, 474, 476) what the Bacchic mysteries are to a sceptic Pentheus, in *Stromateis* 4:25 it is initiation into the mystery of Christ that is worth knowing:

«But we must pass from physics to ethics, which are clearer; for the discourse concerning these will follow after the treatise in hand. The Saviour Himself, then, plainly initiates us into the mysteries, according to the words of the tragedy: “Seeing those who see, he also gives the orgies.” And if you ask, “These orgies, what is their nature?” You will hear again:—“It is forbidden to mortals uninitiated in the Bacchic rites to know.” And if any one will inquire curiously what they are, let him hear:— “It is not lawful for thee to hear, but they are worth knowing; The rites of the God detest him who practices impiety.” ([http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene\\_Fathers](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Fathers) (Downloaded 21.1.2010).

Clement states that he is quoting from «the tragedy», what he cares less about is for what God these passages were written. It is as if he just erases the deity from the text and Christ becomes the Saviour god with secret Bacchic rites, orgies that calls for piety. This is how Seaford 1996, translates the Dionysos-phrases we hear echoed in the text from Clement:

470: «(ὁρῶν ὁρῶντα καὶ δίδωσιν ὄργια)- Face to face, and he gives me mystic rites.»

472: «(ἄρρητ’ ἀβακχεύτοισιν εἰδέναι βροτῶν.)- They may not be spoken for non-bacchants to know.»

474: «(οὐ θέμις ἀκοῦσαί σ’, ἔστι δ’ ἄξι’ εἰδέναι.) -It is not lawful for you to hear, but it is worth knowing.»

476: «The mystic rites of the god are hostile to the one who practices impiety.» (pp.92,93)

It is worth noting that Clement repeats the questions Pentheus asks on what form the rites take and if they benefit the celebrants, and warns against impiety. Impiety can be dangerous, like it is in connection to the Eucharist for the Corinthians which have suffered illness and death, according to Paul, because they have partaken of the Lord's Supper like they would any other meal.



In the *Bacchae*, Dionysos will not satisfy Pentheus' curiosity which is irreverent and only interested in the tantalizing bits that might be related to shocking orgies (which he does indeed witness moments before his death). You must have the right frame of mind to participate in the rites, or indeed to get to know them. We are reminded of *Mark* 8:18 and *Luke* 24:16, and *Bacchae*'s 502, where the wrong mindset interferes with eyesight. The deity is invisible to the hard of heart.

There is another similarity between the gospels and Euripides' *Bacchae*, and that is the origin of these two deities, claiming they were sons of gods. In *Bacchae* Dionysos is the son of the unmarried Semele who found herself pregnant and claimed that the great God Zeus was the father of her baby. Her sisters not only disbelieved her, but spread a rumour that Zeus had been so displeased with Semele's lie that he had killed her to avenge himself. Her father, king Kadmos has his doubts about Semele's story, but feels that the little fib actually gives honour to his house, because it connects it to the gods. (Euripides: 334-340). In the gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke*, Jesus' mother Mary is engaged to Josef, but while still a virgin she becomes pregnant outside of wedlock. An angel tells either Josef (*Matthew* 1:20) or Mary (*Luke* 1:31) that the father of her child is God through the Holy Spirit. In *Mark* (6:3) Jesus is called the son of Mary, he has several brothers and sisters, but no earthly father is mentioned for them all. He calls himself Son of Man (2:28; 8:31), but prays to a Heavenly Father (14:36) and evil spirits claim he is the son of God (3:11; 5:7). In these synoptic gospels and the *Bacchae* a divine origin gives Jesus and Dionysos extraordinary strengths, but it does not make them welcomed by all. They have to reveal their divinity through miracles that convinces many, but which others deny blatantly to believe in.

### **Dionysos as the devil. The serpent and Satan. Ante-Christ and Anti-Christ And the woman is to blame.**

We have just heard how the church father Clement of Alexandria used passages from the *Bacchae* to enhance his message of the Christ cult being free from pagan influences and superior to the Greco-Roman cults. Herrero discusses in his book that the Church Fathers and the Christian apologists felt so threatened by the similarities in the pagan belief, they soon started to exaggerate the likenesses to claim some ancient origin or to distort them, to prove how the pagans had not only stolen the ideas, but had mistaken or perverted them, turning the old «truths» not only into travesties but into falsehoods and lies and therefore not worthy of continuing worship or deification.

This worked of course both ways, the pagan apologists, like Celsus had been quick to point to the similarities, but claimed with certainty that the Christians had mistaken things so they were

(equally) guilty in worshipping mistakes and falsehoods. It became important for either side to claim origin or source of what was presented as «truth».

The construction of two opposing sides aims to break all possible fluidity between one side and the other. On the other hand, it forces the apologists to establish some bridges between both sides that make it possible to insert Christianity into the Greek cultural system by taking advantage of all possible linkages with paganism.» (Herrero de Jáuregui 2010: p.275)

Herrero reduces the place Orphism might have had in the pagan society Clement is addressing to «a fundamental axis of opposition, and for this very reason it also became a bridge that made it possible to overcome the cultural and religious distance between Greek religion and Christianity.» But precisely because there was not such a great distance between the two, in late antiquity there were more converts from the Gentiles than from the Jewish community. For this reason, it became important to establish and strengthen the distance between Greek religion and Christianity. The similarities were there, but the argument became then that they had been the result of theft of truths distorted into caricatures and falsehoods, or - viewed in a little more positive light, slightly mistaken ideas that had first originated from the «older» religion of Israel; God in his mercy had planted a little seed of understanding to make the Gentiles susceptible to the real truth, the true religion of Christianity.

According to Herrero, Orphism became a tool to present the biblical images in a comprehensible way to the Greeks, through associations to a tradition they already found familiar.

This effort directed at integration into Greek paradigms is perceptible in the constant juxtaposition of biblical and classical citations that we find in all apologetic work, situating Greek and biblical literature on the same level of argumentation, although, clearly, assigning them very different statuses. (Ibid: p275)

This contains also the simple method of Clement of Alexandria's quite misogynistic wordplay and here Herrero refers to the work *Protrepticus*.

At the beginning of his attack on the mysteries (2.12.2), Clement associates the maenads cry «Euoi» (εὐόιν), deforming it slightly, with Eve (Εὐάν), the name of the first woman, the cause of sin, and with the name of the serpent in Aramaic (ܥܘܐܢ). (Ibid: 276)

What Clement wants, according to Herrero is for the pagan audiences to mentally associate Eve and the serpent, the origin of sin, with the cry of the Bacchic mysteries, uttered by the sinful and shockingly behaved maenads. The snake becomes no longer an Orphic symbol of rebirth, the bringer of the Chthonic Dionysos, but a bringer of the sexualized sin and the damnation of mankind. We see here the beginning of associating Dionysos with Satan. Dionysos is not just the equivalent of a demon, (daemon) but is actually a fallen angel, or Anti-Christ.

The omnipresence of serpents in Christian descriptions of Orphic myths and rituals is not only due to the real linkage of snakes with chthonic cults, but also to the association with Satan that Clement here makes explicit with a highly forced etymology. Likewise, in *Protr.* 1.7.5, 2.16.2, and 2.22.3 the serpent of the mysteries is identified with Lucifer himself.

The notion that women are to blame for the original misfortune, common to the Greek (Pandora) and biblical (Eve) traditions, is also brought together with their reputation as devotees of maenadism, on the one hand, and of the superstition of the mysteries, on the other. Not only are all maenads female, but women were also considered prone to be seduced by superstition and guilty of its expansion, in both pagan and Christian circles. Cf. Polyb. 12.24.5: τῆς δεισδαίμονίας ἀρχηγοὺς οἰόνται τὰς γυναῖκας. (Ibid: 276-7 and n.92)

The maenads had already been brought into ill dispute, they were an easy target when it came to rumours of orgies and untoward behaviour in the cults. Cults where women had a prominent role was often surrounded by an air of secrecy, even the cults where men participated. These cults were, perhaps therefor, subject to criticism and derision by outsiders, and it did become important for the followers of Christ, as we see in the letters of Paul, to affirm distance to such cults by setting Christ's cult apart by a marked difference in behaviour and rites, particularly where women were concerned: Women were to keep a low profile, should refrain from preaching and save their questions till they could ask their husbands at home (1 Cor. 14:34-5). And they should cover their head when praying and prophesying (1 Cor 11:5), unlike in the Bacchic cults where they could let their hair loose (the mural paintings of Villa dei Misteri).

«Daemon», or δαίμων, could, in biblical terms, mean something different than in traditional epic usage, where it means god,- for the Church Fathers it became quite useful that the evolution of the concept not only gave it the meaning of «demon», but that it could designate the Olympian gods as demons. «Celsus still considers the «daemonic forces» /δαίμονιοι δυνάμεις) positive divine energies, while Origen in his response interprets them as evil powers (CC 8.48).» (Ibid:277).

As mentioned earlier these methods of etymological wordplay and liberal mixing of associations and meanings were shared by both sides.

...in the classical age, Orphism made use of very similar methods to introduce new ideas (possibly of Eastern origin) foreign to the Greek world until then, inserting them into the Greek imaginary by means of associative phonetic-etymological games (*soma-sema*, *telete-teleute*) and the exploitation of polysemy (*arche* as «power» and as «beginning» to designate Zeus in *OF* 14). Plato caricaturized these methods in the *Cratylus*, a depiction which, paradoxically, may have served to inspire later imitators like the Christians. (Ibid:278)

What we see, of course, is a distorting of the old pagan deities into demons - creatures of malevolence with little power compared to the Almighty God of the Christians and the Jews. There is hardly a person, when brought up in the culture of western Europe and the United States, who, when asked to describe what the devil looks like, will not describe him as a man with a goatie, horns and a tail. These three features bear a striking resemblance to Pan and the satyrs, god and demi-gods in connection to Dionysos. In literature, Pan was described as being a hideous creature when newborn, with a little pointy beard, horns on his forehead and a tail. This is also how the faithful followers of them both, satyrs were described; with a mans torso but with the hindlegs of a goat, a tail, of course, and a curly head where two horns protrude and a pointy beard to finish the rather mischievous face off, a face resembling a mask.

Dionysos is also described as being a horned creature and his presence is sometimes made known simply by a mask, placed on the faces of the participants of a cult, or standing on its own, an epiphany of the god. Karl Kerényi writes that Dionysos as a child god with horns «signify that he is the son of Persephone». (Kerényi 2008: 253) He sets this in connection to the version of Dionysos' origin, sometimes told in Orphic stories, where the god is a part of the everlasting couple of regeneration, as told of earlier.

## Conclusion

My thesis have been that the dying and rising deity of salvation of Christ have been influenced by the dying and rising Dionysos, so much so, we can almost say that Dionysos in his Bacchic and Orphic interpretation is a forerunner to the soteriological figure of Christ. To show the similarities between the two I have pointed to the strong emphasis on wine there is in the cult of Christ. I have taken a deeper look at the rites and theology of the cult and found that it did not differ much from the other mystery cult on offer at the time. The eschatological ideas of the Christ cult are not unique either, offering a release from the eternal damnation of the soul rejected by God through initiation of the Jesus-cult, hopes for a better afterlife or indeed a life out of the death experience was also on offer from many mystery cults, such as the Demeter/Kore cult and the Orphic cults of Bacchus. The latter promising release from the guilt inherited through the titanic side of man and a (re)instatement among the immortals as the body was escaped and the sin atoned, leaving the soul free to be all Dionysiac and godlike.

There has been a second claim evolving through my working with this thesis and that is the influence of the many early churches, originating from Gentile communities, on the development of Christianity. It did seem to me, as I worked on my thesis, that it was maintained, that not only was Christianity free from any fundamental influence from the neighbouring religions of Greece and Rome, it was also a strand of Judaism fully developed in Palestine, away from contaminating influences, when it was «released» on the world to convert and save people, who were left so changed by the fact they were experiencing faith for the first time in their life, that whatever thoughts they might have had and voiced concerning this new movement, was so convincingly answered by Paul and his likes, that Christianity could emerge as one unison religion. This is of course far from the truth and my suspicion is rather provocatively phrased, but the many books I have read on the letters of Paul, which are, due to the fact they are letters, parts of a communication, have mostly ignored what might have originating from these Gentile communities. We do not have the letters the Corinthian might have written to Paul, but if we had we would, no doubt, have seen a

community helped shape the cult they had joined. The cults of Christ were many and varied greatly from each other, it was not one particular entity that spread in the area around the Mediterranean without being formed by the people who welcomed it into their religious perception. We see this particularly in how much the early church has changed from how Smith (1990) describes it in *Drudgery Divine*.

My second thesis of the influence from the Gentile Christ cults has its basis in my first thesis, that the influence of the dying and rising saviour deity of Dionysos continued to influence the Christ cult as Christianity spread and made its mark on the places it reached. I feel I have managed to show this in the chapters of my thesis.

I wish to conclude my discussion around the topics I have already treated in my thesis, by implementing themes from the iconographical finds I have made, both on the common usage of the figure Orpheus, but also the mixing of Christian, Jewish and Bacchic images in the first few centuries of the early church. This includes Sepphoris.

We heard in the **Introduction** that a pagan temple has been unearthed in Sepphoris, whose worship is unknown, but a coin found close by shows that there were a temple in Sepphoris dedicated to Zeus and Tyche, the latter having some connections to Dionysos. This temple is from the second century C.E. and the building of a church (Byzantine period) on top of its ruins show how the sacred section of the city was preserved. This find not only signify that Sepphoris, the Jewish capital of the Galilee, had a large pagan population, (large enough to warrant a temple to its gods), the city was also quite Hellenistic in its atmosphere since the Romans had been allowed to build a temple in the middle of the city. The temple was located at the south of the decumanus, colonnaded street and was approximately 24 by 12 meters with a decorated fasade facing the street.

In 1995 a building from the 3rd century C.E. was excavated in Sepphoris, revealing beautiful, colourful panels of mosaic depicting Orpheus, situated west of the central colonnaded street of the city. A triclinium was located in its center with additional rooms located around it with a colourful mosaic. A preliminary study suggest it to be from the end of the third century, or early fourth century C.E. The panels are arranged similarly to those in the Dionysiac floor of the adjacent building I will return to below. The divine singer Orpheus is depicted in the central carpet, sitting on a rock playing a string instrument. He is surrounded by wild animals and birds soothed by his music

Another building from around the same period (beginning of the third century C.E.) shows mosaics of Dionysos and his cult. The building seems to have been a private dwelling, it is situated

south of the theatre and it was 45 by 23 meters. The theatre shows the presence of Greco-Roman citizens, even though «numerous scholars believe it may be associated with the taste of the Jewish leadership at the time and perhaps of Herodes Antipas himself, who rebuilt the city center in the first century CE.» (Meyers 2006:183)

The mosaic referred to is situated in the triclinium in the northern part of the building, it is large, 9 x 7 meters and contains fifteen panels depicting the life of Dionysos. The panels were made to be viewed from the margins of the mosaic. We can imagine the couches for reclining that would have lined the room around the mosaic, and we are reminded of the importance of the symposium in the Greco-Roman, or rather Hellenistic society. The figures are identified with Greek inscriptions. A frame of twenty-two medallions depicting hunting scenes are formed by intertwining acanthus leaves which then surround the central carpet. The U-shaped strip to the south of the main carpet depicts different activities from the cult of Dionysos. The central carpet depicts Heracles and Dionysos in a drinking contest.

Who could have lived in this mansion, is uncertain, according to Meyers (2006:181). He claims that the vast majority of the Sepphoreans were Jewish. In spite of the pagan decorations, Meyer does not find it impossible that the villa belonged to a leading Jewish citizen, it might also have served as a meeting place for the *boule* or municipal council, or as a guest house for visitors. (Ibid:181) «While the artists and artisans who executed the mosaic may have been Gentile, it is difficult not to conclude that its patrons and sponsors were Jewish, were drawn from the majority population, and were comfortable in the Hellenized world of Roman-period Palestine.» (p.181)

The most interesting find from Sepphoris and which particularly relates to my concluding discussion was excavated in 2005 by the Hebrew University Excavation Project, and is most likely from the 5th century C.E. I repeat the quote from the **Introduction**:

Extremely important is a small box, most probably an incense burner, found in Area 77.1. It is carved in limestone and decorated on its sides with various images. Traces of red on the box indicate that the object was partly or even fully painted. Although we found only half of it, this find is unique and has no parallel in the region. A crucified figure is represented on the only complete side of the broken box; a satyr playing a musical instrument and a dancing maenad appear on one broken side while a bull or ram with a tree in the background is depicted on the other [ ]. The bull, or preferably ram, who seems to be caught in the thicket and hovering above ground, resembles the Christian rendering of the sacrifice of Isaac that conjures the image of a cross; similar depictions of the animal with the tree in the background were found, for example, on several mosaic pavements decorating the churches in Jordan, giving visual expression to the Christian interpretation of the biblical story. Such a mixture of religious and secular themes adorning one object characterizes the prevailing iconographical tastes of Byzantine art. ( Davis in Zip-report 05[1] 2005: p 9, or internet reference nr.3).

We heard that the author of this excavation report calls it «a mixture of religious and secular themes», the religious images of a neighbouring religion within the region, is here simply called

«secular». I see a mix of Bacchic and Christian symbols that we find repeated in the Berlin seal (Herrero 2010:125), where a crucified figure is depicted under seven stars on a little amulet bearing the inscriptions: Orpheos Bakkikos. Herrero (2010:61) writes about two large funerary cloths from the fifth century C.E., one depicts a Dionysiac scene similar to the murals from the Villa dei Misteri and the other have show scenes from the life of Jesus and Mary. They were both found in the same tomb in Egypt, showing, according to Herrero, how easy it was to syncretize the religion of the Greco-Roman and the Christian. He refers as well to a scene among Christian ones on the walls of the hypogeum of Viale Manzoni at Rome, dated around 250 C.E., where one scene stands out as it depicts a scene known from the Orphic gold leaf containing Mnemosyne, two fountains and a white cypress (Ibid:71). Does all these common uses of Orphic and Christian symbols mean anything. Do they, as I do interpret, show that the similarities between the cults was so apparent to the people living in this milieu, that they chose to mix them freely because the blend itself signified something to them?

Herrero writes: «Visual art gives in fact the most reliable portrait of the mental situation of viewers of all religions of the Late Roman Empire.» (2010:118). He goes on to say there are many Christian representations of Orpheus (or of Christ as Orpheus) in Christian art. Orpheus playing the lyre surrounded by animals have been found depicted in the frescos of the Roman catacombs, and also in a sarcophages relief (Ibid:118).

Many saw the similarities between the two cults and found them disturbing to the degree they started a frontal attack on the cult of the pagans, as we have seen.

I feel I have shown in this thesis that the cult of the dying and rising saviour deity of Christ can very well have been influenced and shaped by the neighbour cult of the Orphic Bacchus.

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